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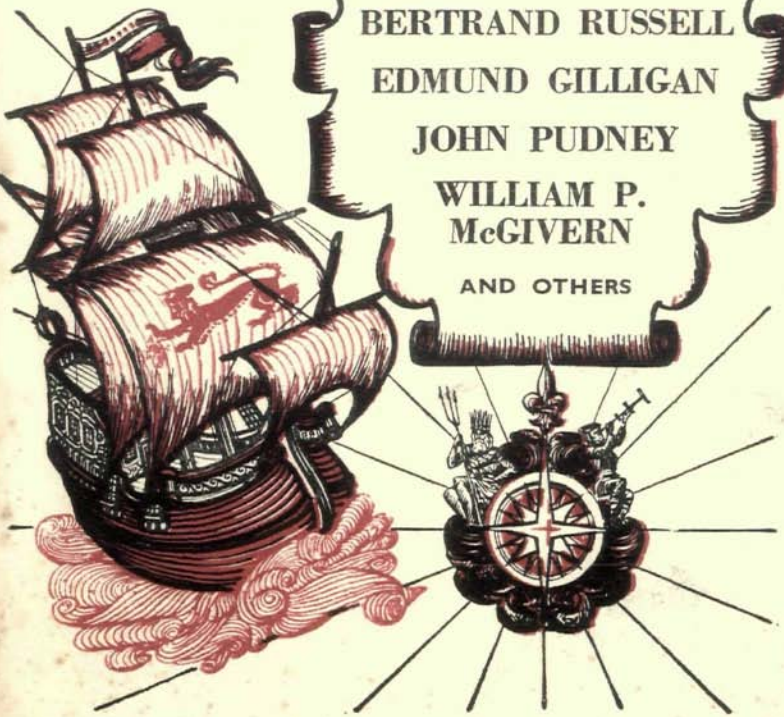

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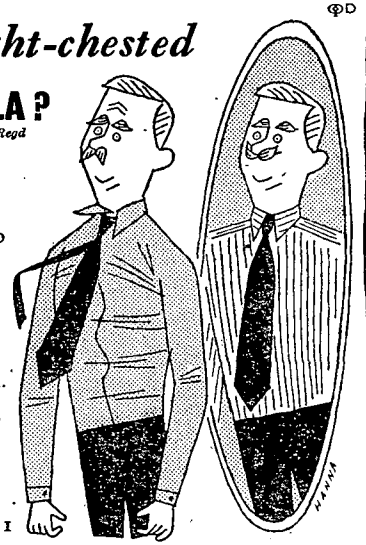

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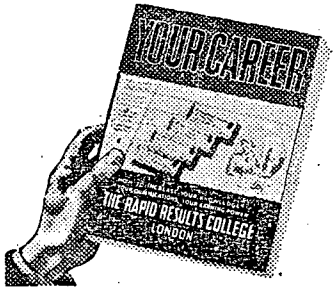

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ARGOSY

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Autumn Gardens

THE flowers of autumn, the yellow and mauve,
Feed like fire in a slow stove
On the year's hoarded sun. The flowers and the days
Are warm and fruit-like now.

I half, through haze
Of hands and hair of the child with me,
See cabbages, purple of weed under sea,
In the park allotments; and asters by soft weather
Plum-bloomed, by sun and mist dissolved together.

In suburban gardens the sunflower generations
Follow on, as stars through the night to their stations,
And wherever out of hand wild ragwort blazes
There is the blue blinding smoke of Michaelmas daisies.

E. J. SCOVELL

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AN OPENING FOR FATHER

"And remember," says Mother, "this is none of my husband's choosing"

by JOHN PUDNEY

"I AM a punctual man," says Father, "or I should not be where I am." He is standing on the steps of the Temperance Hotel at a seaside resort called Berdingham, though he is really referring to his position as Sanitary Inspector at home, a post Mother always says does him the utmost credit.

"I know, dear," says Mother, fumbling in her bag. "Your punctuality has always made just that difference."

"Just what difference?" shouts Father, rather unreasonably, in my opinion, seeing that Mother is trying to concentrate on finding the invitation card, and the Temperance Hotel prides itself on nice quiet customers who rarely allow themselves to be overheard.

"You might still be a clerk in the Drains Department," explains Mother in a weary but penetrating voice.

Now, this is silly of Mother, because there is a Sanitary Conference at Berdingham, which coincides with the official opening of the new drainage system, the most modern in the country, to which we have all been invited. The place, as Father has already pointed out, is alive with Sanitary Inspectors, and one must do what one can to maintain the prestige, not only of oneself (that was when Mother wanted to carry her knitting in a string bag), but of the calling as a whole.

"All the same," says Mother, "you must both admit that I usually know where a thing is when I put it down. Let me see, I was holding the oranges, the vacuum flask, and my knitting, when you took the invitation card from the mantelshelf and gave it to me because you would be changing your suit . . ."

Mother dabbles here and there with her right hand while saying this, and Father starts at every dabble as if it hurt him.

"It is a good thing," I say, "that Father is punctual. It allows Mother a short time to look through her things. It can't be far away."

Instead of making things easier, as I had hoped, this makes them both speak at once, recalling past tribulations. At last Father cries out: "I am a patient man, but—" His voice has

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rattled the hat-stand in the hall of the Temperance Hotel, and we turn curiously to see what made him break off his sentence. "Good morning, Alwether, my dear chap—and Mrs. Alwether. I am delighted to see you. Off to the Opening, I expect?"

Now, Father has a great fear of Alwether's arriving anywhere before himself, ever since Mr. Alwether, simply by being early, shook hands with a Minister of Health, who himself had arrived an hour early by mistake at a fête. Moreover, Mr. Alwether has stubborn views on the clearance of storm-water, and this very system of new drainage at Berdingham, Father has said, is to be both an eye-opener, and a humiliation for such as old Alwether.

"I'm sure I've got it on me," mutters Mother, hustling forward with panic-stricken composure to greet Mrs. Alwether and to note that she has had her hat dyed.

"If Father doesn't go too quickly, then, I expect we can find it," I suggest, as we set off down the steps towards Mr. Alwether, who is wearing black suede shoes and looking very much the gent, though on the ostentatious side.

It is indeed fortunate that Father is so punctual. Never for a second giving way to his real feelings, which are now turbulent, he takes up Mr. Alwether on the question of storm-water disposal.

"Berdingham is going to be a lesson to people like you Alwether," he laughs, trying to conceal his heavy heart.

"I wonder! I wonder!" replies Alwether, pointing disdainfully to a huge new grating in the gutter outside the hotel.

"Ah!" Father, gaining time for Mother who, we notice, is groping to the very depths of her handbag, nudges Alwether delightedly. "You've never so much as seen inside one of them. You look!"

Carried away by some purely professional enthusiasm—incomprehensible, I admit, to those of us who are not officials—Father surprises us by darting forward, bracing himself against one end of the grating, and heaving at a kind of lifting-ring at the other.

"I'll just show you, Alwether," he cries.

And that is the last we hear of him.

A shocking misfortune overtakes Father. The grating swings, and the end he is standing on sinks beneath him. Father disappears. The mechanism has behaved—as Mr. Alwether rather callously remarks—as it would behave in the event of a sudden flood of storm-water.

"Why! He's gone underground!" cries Mother.

"Madam, allow me!" cries Mr. Alwether, courteous if affected, even in this extremity, leaping to the brink of the cavity. "He cannot have gone far. Hullo, there! Hullo, there!"

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" This is the end of your Father! " cries poor Mother in a dreadful voice. " To think I disappointed him at the end, too! "

" Hullo, there! " Mr. and Mrs. Alwether are shouting together down the hole.

" Speak, speak, speak! " cries Mother, joining them.

Naturally, the four of us, dressed as we are, attract some attention in this part of Berdingham. People run up to us from all directions.

" This is a job for an expert," says Mr. Alwether, nevertheless keeping his distance.

The cavity is dark, and there is a sucking noise coming from it, and occasionally a sound like the sea.

" There is a Corporation dustman living nearly opposite," says a lady with tears in her eyes, who also points out that the new drainage system is only a burden on the ratepayers and will never come to any good.

" If I could only remember what his last words were," sobs Mother, rather suddenly, it seems to me, giving him up for good.

" You fetch the police while I telephone the Corporation," says Mr. Alwether, ever the practical man. " These newfangled storm-water-disposal plants might carry him anywhere."

" You mean he's still moving? " I ask.

" Of course he is. He might be anywhere in the system by this time. Anywhere."

" Wouldn't the Corporation dustman . . . ? "

" No, he wouldn't. Why even I . . ." Mr. Alwether, not to disparage himself professionally, adds: " Your Father can have no idea himself, come to that."

A policeman arrives, and then a fire-engine. Mother faints, saying: " He was always punctual, too."

A fireman is lowered into the cavity and reappears covered with seaweed and shaking his head.

Mr. Alwether now insists that he must see the blueprints of the whole drainage system, and Mrs. Alwether revives Mother to explain somewhat boastfully that her husband has seen worse things through than this, he having been in Blackpool when the pier caught fire, and in Bunga during a native rising.

The crowd surrounds the firemen, watching them gurgling, spluttering, and picking seaweed off their helmets.

Though Mother keeps saying she wishes to lie down and die as close as possible to the cavity, without falling in, we persuade her to enter a cab to drive to the Town Hall. As Mr. Alwether says, there can hardly be an official Opening with Father circulating in the system, and the Town Hall is bound to be the nerve-centre for any plan devised for recovering Father.

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Our news has preceded us, and though Mother is reciting a longish prayer and can remember only half the words, they regard us with some annoyance.

"The principal Sanitary Authorities in the country come to see my new drainage system—and there is that fool of a man swishing about down there . . ." says a responsible Berdingham official, without much regard for our feelings. "Now, which grating was it he went down?"

An enormous new blueprint is unfolded: and Mr. Alwether begins by looking for the Temperance Hotel and tracing our route backwards. "Good lord, Mr. Alwether," cries the official at last, "he must have entered right in front of our key junction! If that gets blocked up!"

"All I can say is that if the system is as inflexible as that, it would never suit me," Mr. Alwether raps back.

Before they can begin to get into the technical swing, Mother slumps down, dragging the blueprint with her, and one of the Berdingham Councillors, who is a doctor, has her carried outside. Her lapse spurs them on to action.

Messengers are sent out by the anxious (for his system, I suspect, rather than for Father) official to tell the fire brigade to flush the cavity with their hoses, in case Father is stuck, and to explain at the Mayor's Parlour that Father is in the system, and that it may not be expedient to open it.

"Now, let us trace out the right-hand channel, Mr. Alwether."

Only once do they pause, to ask me the rough dimensions of Father. Then the official's face brightens suddenly, as he cries: "He is probably in the sludge distributor."

Mother takes a brave view of this when we pick her up outside: "I am sure he will have the expert knowledge to let himself out."

Few even of the experts have seen a sludge distributor like this, however. If Father is inside, he will be extremely giddy by now, for the thing circulates the sludge at a great rate, and it takes them some time to stop it.

"And now you'll have to take it to bits," says Mr. Alwether, looking round, and winking at me. "I thought there might be drawbacks to a system such as this."

Engineers have been called in to take the sludge distributor to pieces. It is full of seaweed. But Mother, recovered now and unwilling to miss the excitement of such an unusual search, darts forward with an exultant cry: "His teeth!"

In her hand are Father's lowers, unmistakably.

"How he must have fought," says Mother, "to keep them! He is such a careful man."

"All this is wrecking our new drainage scheme," grumbles the

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Berdingham official impatiently. "If he has been through the sludge distributor, he might be anywhere."

"Where will it all end, may I ask?" Mr. Alwether inquires.

"The Sewage Farm, the purifying coke beds, or the sea. And I'd like to know, what will the Mayor say, and what sort of figure shall I cut before the Conference of Sanitary Inspectors?"

He seems only to think of himself, this official, and I cannot help feeling that he is implying that Father is to blame. "If Father has reached the Sewage Farm," I say to him with what dignity I can muster, "there will be no need for you to postpone your ceremony at the Town Hall."

"And please remember," puts in Mother resolutely, "that this misfortune is none of my husband's choosing, but merely proves the weakness of your system."

Mother will never admit defeat. Though she realizes that the chances of Father attending the Opening are now scanty, she continues to hunt with one hand in her reticule for the invitation card.

"Half an hour to go!" sighs the official. "And this Opening was to have been the turning-point of my career."

We all look at our watches, and Mother sighs and says how sad it is to think of poor Father floating, he knows not whither, fighting to preserve his uppers in all that seaweed.

With such thoughts in all our minds, we form a melancholy procession along the Front leading towards the Sewage Farm. As we approach the Pier, Mother, still absent-mindedly fumbling in her bag, is trying to recollect Father's favourite hymn, and the official is arguing that the Sewage Farm men, generally so alert, would be certain to have noticed Father if he was there, and to have informed the Authorities, when a shrill whistle interrupts us.

It comes from an old salt who has been rowing a fishing-boat for dear life, and now runs up the beach. We stop, noticing that he is frantic with excitement. "He came slap into my net, ladies and gents. I thought he was a whale, that I did. But before I could get him aboard, he looked at his wrist-watch and began to carry on something awful about the time. Wouldn't explain where he'd come from or let me bring him in or anything. Just turned on his back and went on swimming, even after I overtook him and offered him a tow—"

The old salt is cut short by our cries of recognition at seeing Father hurrying towards us.. "I trust I am not too late," he says. "I am a punctual man, and I trust the Town Hall is not too far."

We all shake hands. "Here are your teeth, dear," says Mother. "Have you lost anything else?"

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" I do not believe so. I was careful to swim on my back."

We stand round while Father goes through his pockets. From his upper right-hand waistcoat-pocket, he produces the invitation to the Opening. The ink has run a little but, happily, it is still plainly legible.

" Thank goodness for that," says Father, smiling at Mother.

" I knew I put it somewhere," Mother says.

So we are punctual for the Opening. Mother says it shows that Father is right always to keep a little time in hand. She is picking the seaweed off Father before it is his turn to shake hands with the Mayor of Berdingham.

" Hush! " Father mutters. " Not in front of the Alwethers."

★ ★ ★

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Pilgrims to Stratford were also determined to catch a glimpse of the famous novelist, Marie Corelli. If word went round that she was in a certain shop it was besieged by would-be customers. When she drove smartly through the streets in her pony-carriage people thronged the pavements. Boat-hirers did a brisk trade among those anxious to see her leaning back on her gondola cushions (sometimes these were scarlet, sometimes royal purple) with parasol held aloft. The road outside Mason Croft was patrolled by strangers who pointed cameras at the flower-decked windows.

Remarkably few, however, succeeded in achieving the snap-shot of their ambition. The windows were discreetly masked in white net; the gondolier was adept at warding off unwelcome attentions; the lady herself was uncommonly quick to shield her face with her parasol or turn her head the other way—for she greatly disliked being photographed.

Once, when on the river with a friend, she spied a man with a camera in a nearby punt and promptly cloaked herself and her companion with a rug; an action which nearly involved her in another lawsuit, for to her fury the next day's paper printed a photograph of a grotesque humped shape with the caption " Marie Corelli in her Gondola."

But those were the days of " souvenirs," so nobody minded much about the lack of snapshots . . . The cabmen at the station offered to drive tourists to Mason Croft, so that they might pick a sprig of creeper through the railings, more often than to drive them to Shakespeare's birthplace; and there is a legend that when an American asked if Marie were married, a driver replied: " Oh, no, sir, you see William Shakespeare is dead! "

EILEEN BIGLAND, *Marie Corelli*

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★ *When a philosopher turns to fiction—and when that philosopher is Bertrand Russell, O.M., Nobel Prize-winner, who made his début in fiction at eighty-one, with "Satan in the Suburbs"—readers may expect the result to be unusual and intriguing. Argosy has chosen this story from his brilliant new collection, "Nightmares of Eminent Persons."*

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S NIGHTMARE

by BERTRAND RUSSELL

THE Queen of Sheba, returning from her visit to King Solomon, was riding through the desert on a white ass with her Grand Vizier beside her on an ass of more ordinary colour. As they rode, she discoursed reminiscently about the wealth and wisdom of Solomon.

"I had always thought," she said, "that I do pretty well in the way of royal splendour, and I had hoped beforehand that I should be able to hold my own, but when I had seen his possessions I had no spirit left in me. But the treasures of his palace are as nothing to the treasures of his mind. Ah, my dear Vizier, what wisdom, what knowledge of life, what sagacity his conversation displays! If you had as much political sagacity in your whole body as that King has in his little finger, we should have none of these troubles in my kingdom.

"But it is not only in wealth and wisdom that he is matchless. He is also (though perhaps I am the only one privileged to know this) a supreme poet. He gave me as we parted a jewelled volume in his own inimitable handwriting, telling in language of exquisite beauty the joy that he had experienced in my company. There are passages celebrating some of my more intimate charms which I should blush to show you; but there are portions of this book which I may perhaps read to you to beguile the evenings of our journey through the desert. In this exquisite volume not only are his own words such as any lady would love to hear from amorous lips, but by a quintessence of imaginative sympathy he has attributed to me poetic words which I should be glad to have uttered.

"Never again, I am convinced, shall I find such perfect union, such entire harmony, and such penetration into the recesses of the

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soul. My public duties, alas, compel me to return to my kingdom, but I shall carry with me to my dying day the knowledge that there is on earth one man worthy of my love."

"Your Majesty," replied the Vizier, "it is not for me to instil doubts into the royal breast, but to all those who serve you, it is incredible that among men your equal should exist."

At this moment, emerging out of the sunset, a weary figure appeared on foot.

"Who may this be?" said the Queen.

"Some beggar, Your Majesty," said the Grand Vizier. "I strongly advise you to steer clear of him."

But a certain dignity in the aspect of the approaching stranger seemed to her indicative of something more than a beggar. And in spite of the Grand Vizier's protests she turned her ass towards him. "And who may you be?" she said.

His answer dispelled at once the Grand Vizier's suspicions, for he spoke in the most polished idiom of the court of Sheba: "Your Majesty," he said, "my name is Beelzebub, but it is probably unknown to you, as I seldom travel far from the land of Canaan. Who you are, I know. And not only who you are, but whence you come, and what fancies inspire your sunset meditations. You have come, I know, from visiting that wise king who, though my humble guise might seem to belie my words, has been for many years my firm friend. I am convinced that he has told you concerning himself all that he wishes you to know. But if—though the hypothesis seems rash—there is anything that you wish to know concerning him beyond what he has seen fit to tell, you have but to ask me, for he has no secrets from me."

"You surprise me," said the Queen, "but I see that our conversation will be too long to be conducted conveniently while you walk and I ride. My Grand Vizier shall dismount and give his ass to you."

With an ill grace the Grand Vizier complied.

"I suppose," the Queen said, "that your conversations with Solomon were mainly concerned with statecraft and matters of deep wisdom. I, as a Queen not unrenowned for wisdom, also conversed with him on these topics; but some of our conversation—so at least I flatter myself—revealed a side of him less intimately known, I should imagine, to you than to me. And some of the best of this he put into a book which he gave to me as we parted. This book contains many beauties, for example, a lovely description of the spring."

"Ah," said Beelzebub, "and does he in this description speak of the voice of the turtle?"

"Why, yes," said the Queen. "But how did you guess?"

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"Oh, well," Beelzebub replied, "he was proud of having noticed the turtle talking in the spring and liked to bring it in when he could."

"Some of his compliments," the Queen resumed, "particularly pleased me. I had practised Hebrew during the journey to Jerusalem, but was not sure whether I had mastered it adequately. I was therefore delighted when he said, 'Thy speech is comely.'"

"Very nice of him," said Beelzebub. "And did he at the same time remark that your Majesty's temples are like a piece of pomegranate?"

"Well, really," said the Queen, "this is getting uncanny! He did say so, and I thought it rather an odd remark. But how on earth did you guess?"

"Well," Beelzebub replied, "you know all great men have kinks, and one of his is a peculiar interest in pomegranates."

"It is true," said the Queen, "that some of his comparisons are a little odd. He said, for instance, that my eyes were like the fish-pools of Heshbon."

"I have known him," said Beelzebub, "to make even stranger comparisons. Did he ever compare your Majesty's nose to the Tower of Lebanon?"

"Good gracious," said the Queen, "this is too much! He did make that comparison. But you are persuading me that you must have some more intimate source of knowledge than I had suspected."

"Your Majesty," Beelzebub replied, "I fear that what I have to say may cause you some pain. The fact is that some of his wives were friends of mine, and through them I got to know him well."

"Yes, but how about this love poem?"

"Well, you see, when he was young, while his father was still alive, he had to take more trouble. In those days he loved a farmer's virtuous daughter, and only overcame her scruples by his poetic gifts. Afterwards, he thought it a pity the gifts should be wasted, and he gave a copy to each of his ladies in turn. You see, he was essentially a collector, as you must have noticed when you went over his house. By long practice, he made each in turn think herself supreme in his affections; and you, dear lady, are his last and most signal triumph."

"Oh, the wretch!" she said. "Never again will I be deceived by the perfidy of man. Never again will I let flattery blind me. To think that I, who throughout my dominions am accounted the wisest of women, should have permitted myself to be so misled!"

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"Nay, dear lady," said Beelzebub, "be not so cast down, for Solomon is not only the wisest man in his dominions, but the wisest of all men, and will be known as such through countless ages. To have been deceived by him is scarcely matter for shame."

"Perhaps you are right," she said, "but it will take time to heal the wound to my pride."

"Ah, sweet Queen," Beelzebub replied, "how happy could I be if I could hasten the healing work of Time! Far be it from me to imitate the wiles of that perfidious monarch. From me shall flow only simple words dictated by the spontaneous sentiments of the heart. To you, the Peerless, the Incomparable, the Matchless Jewel of the South, I would give—if you permit it—whatever balm a true appreciation of your worth can offer."

"Your words are soothing," she replied, "but can you match his splendours? Have you a palace that can compare with his? Have you such store of precious stones? Such robes, purveying the aroma of myrrh and frankincense? And, more important than any of these, have you a wisdom equal to his?"

"Lovely Sheba," he replied, "I can satisfy you on every point. I have a palace far grander than Solomon's. I have a far greater store of precious stones. My Robes of State are as numerous as the stars in the sky. And as for wisdom, his is not a match for mine. Solomon is surprised that, although the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. I know why this is, and will explain it to Your Majesty on some long winter evening. To come to a more serious lapse it was after he had seen you that he said, 'There is no new thing under the sun.' Can you doubt that in his thoughts he was comparing you unfavourably with the farmer's daughter of his youth? And can any man be accounted wise who, having beheld you, does not at once perceive that here is a new wonder of beauty and majesty? No! In a competition of wisdom I have nothing to fear from him."

With a smile, half of resignation concerning the past, and half of dawning hope for a happier future, she turned her eyes upon Beelzebub and said: "Your words are beguiling. I made a long journey from my kingdom to Solomon's, and I thought I had seen what is most noteworthy on this earth. But, if you speak truth, your kingdom, your palace, and your wisdom, all surpass Solomon's. May I extend my journey by a visit to your dominion?"

He returned her smile with one in which the appearance of love barely concealed the reality of triumph. "I can imagine no greater delight," he said, "than that you should allow me this opportunity to place my poor riches at your feet. Let us go while yet the night is young. But the way is dark and difficult, and

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infested by fierce robbers. If you are to be safe, you must trust yourself completely to my guidance."

"I will," she said. "You have given me new hope."

At this moment they arrived at a measureless cavern in the mountainside. Holding aloft a flaming torch, Beelzebub led the way through long tunnels and tortuous passages. At last they emerged into a vast hall lit by innumerable lamps. The walls and roof glittered with precious stones whose scintillating facets flashed back the light of the lamps. In solemn state, three hundred silver thrones were ranged round the walls.

"This is indeed magnificent," said the Queen.

"Oh," said Beelzebub, "this is only my second-rate hall of audience. You shall now see the Presence Chamber."

Opening a hitherto invisible door, he led her into another hall, more than twice as large as the first, more than twice as brilliantly lit, and more than twice as richly jewelled. Round three walls of this hall were seven hundred golden thrones. On the fourth wall were two thrones, composed entirely of precious stones, diamonds, sapphires, rubies, huge pearls, bound together by some strange art which the Queen could not fathom.

"This," he said, "is my Great Hall, and of the two jewelled thrones, one is mine and the other shall be yours."

"But who is to occupy the seven hundred golden thrones?"

"Ah, well," he said, "you will know that in due course."

As he spoke, a queenly figure, only slightly less splendid than the Queen of Sheba, glided in and occupied the first of the golden thrones. With something of a shock, the Queen of Sheba recognized Solomon's Chief Consort.

"I had not expected to meet her here," she said with a tremor.

"Ah, well," said Beelzebub, "you see, I have magic powers. And while I have been wooing you, I have been telling this good lady also that Solomon is not all he seems. She listened to my words as you have listened, and she has come."

Scarcely had he finished speaking, when another lady, whom also the Queen of Sheba recognized from her visit to Solomon's harem, entered and occupied the second golden throne. Then came a third, a fourth, a fifth, until it seemed as if the procession would never end. At last all the seven hundred golden thrones were occupied.

"You may be wondering," Beelzebub remarked in silken tones, "about the three hundred silver thrones. All these are by now occupied by Solomon's three hundred concubines. All the thousand in this hall and the other have heard from me words not unlike those that you have heard, all have been convinced by me, and all are here."

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"Perfidious monster!" exclaimed the Queen. "How could I have had the simplicity to let myself be deceived a second time! Henceforth I will reign alone, and no male shall ever again be given a chance to deceive me. Good-bye, foul fiend! If you ever venture into my dominions, you shall suffer the fate that your villainy has deserved."

"No, good lady," Beelzebub replied, "I am afraid you do not quite realize the position. I showed you the way in, but only I can find the way out. This is the abode of the dead, and you are here for all eternity—but not for all eternity on the diamond throne beside mine. That you will occupy only until you are superseded by an even more divine queen, the last Queen of Egypt."

These words produced in her such a tumult of rage and despair that she awoke.

"I fear," said the Grand Vizier, "that your Majesty has had troubled dreams."

★ ★ ★

HIGH SOCIETY

High though their titles and proud their names, the following ladies and gentlemen had a distinction other than rank. See if you can tell who's who in this Debrett. Allow one point for recognizing the character, one for the source, and one for the author in each case, making a total of twenty-four points. You will find the answers on page 104.

1. *Half-owre, half-owre to Aberdour, this gude Scots lord wetted more than his cork-heel'd shoon.*
2. *If you were lady's-maid to this untidy Majesty, your wages would be twopence a week and jam every other day.*
3. *It took a silver bullet to end the black reign of this Emperor.*
4. *With some of his courtiers he took to the woods, where he discovered lapidary sermons and good in everything.*
5. *A sturdy Scythian, his ambition was to ride—in triumph through Persepolis.*
6. *A most extraordinary crisis faced this British monarch—the United States decided to join his Empire.*
7. *A cruel-hearted queen, but then she reigned for only one day—and that's why Mother had to wake her early.*
8. *Ruler of a floating island, it took a flapper or two to bring him back to earth.*

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END OF SEASON

Love, he knew, could strike anyone, at any time

by I. A. R. WYLIE

THE wide double doors of the Salon de Boule stood open to the dank sweetness of a September night. From across the green-baize gambling-table Paul Mersier could see the elms of the Casino park standing like tattered, melancholy sentinels, on guard over the shadow-filled and silent bandstand. Yesterday it had been the still faintly beating heart of the little watering-place. The last cure guests had eddied round it, listening to the scratchy, earnest orchestra and sipping in stubborn hope from their numbered glasses. Today, like migratory birds at a secret signal, they had taken flight. The fallen leaves, hunted across the yellow square of light, might have been their withered, defeated ghosts.

Paul heard the soft bounce of the rubber ball as Jean Lefèvre tossed it onto the whirling wheel and the familiar monotone—*Messieurs, faites vos jeux!* The outcome of the throw meant nothing to him. But at the *Rien ne va plus!* he became professionally alert. The ball rolled from pocket to pocket, wavered tantalizingly, and then, with a soft derisive sigh, dropped into its final choice.

Le sept!

None of the three left-over players had won. Paul extended his rake and swept in their red and white disks. Briefly his eyes rested on the woman opposite. It was not his business to be concerned with people—except to watch for those who tried to make sneak bids or who snatched at winnings that were not theirs. He recognized them as they took their places—their very hands betrayed them—but as to what else they were, or why, he neither knew nor cared to know. He had long since become inflexible, colourless, and indifferent.

The two men at the table were old and shabby. Death had set an irrevocable seal on them. They had come here as a last hope. They would not come again. Yet they still played with a stubborn avidity for what no longer could have value to them. But the woman came every year. On a certain date she took her chosen place at the table, and on a certain date it was taken by a stranger, and Paul Mersier was conscious of some disturbance

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within himself like the explosion of a deeply submerged depth-charge, sending only a ripple, a few fragments of meaningless wreckage, to the steel-smooth surface of his life.

She played a timid, familiar system. A hundred francs *en plein*—always on the five—a side bid of a hundred francs on red. She won or she lost a little. Even before he had become aware of her, he had learnt to recognize her fragile and innocent hand stretched out briefly with its offering into the strident light. She played with a sort of humble patience, like a suppliant at a shrine of miracles. Tonight, he realized, she had outstayed her time. Something urgent still held her here. And for once, as though chance revenged itself on her for this break with the order of her going, she had lost consistently. Paul had raked in the last red disk. But she still watched and waited.

When at the last turn of the wheel Lefèvre announced, "*Le cinq!*" Paul looked up and saw her white face quiver into a smile, not bitter, but infinitely sad and faintly mocking.

She wasn't young. She wasn't old. The smooth hair was still nut-brown. The lines on the delicately boned face were somehow becoming to it. She had the sort of gentle grace that some women develop out of a homely and awkward youth. For a moment the fine, melancholy eyes met Paul's, and the smile warmed to a wry, acknowledging friendliness. He remembered the times when she had had a run of fortune and shyly, almost apologetically, had pushed a hundred-franc note towards him. He had accepted the gift, blank-faced. "The employees thank you, Madame."

Madame or Mademoiselle—who knew? She was as anonymous to him as the rest of the avid, voracious pack bunched about his table. Or so he had thought. Now he felt absurdly that they knew each other, that in some strange way they had been fellow voyagers and that, together, they had reached the end of their journey.

"The season is finished, Madame and Messieurs."

Paul glanced at the clock in the shadow overhead. Midnight. The two old men gathered up what was left to them and shambled wearily over to the *caissier*. An attendant had already drawn a baize cover over the quiet wheel and the adjacent empty table. Lefèvre slipped down from his high chair, yawning and stretching frankly. But still, for a moment longer, the woman sat, with her white hands folded in front of her, looking down at the table—a sickly stagnant pool of green under the concentrated light.

She's saying good-bye, he thought.

When she stood up she made him a little bow, self-distrustful like all her movements, but rather touching in its resignation and

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dignity. He saw her stand hesitant in the open doorway. Then she was gone into the dark with the fallen, scurrying leaves.

Well—that summer's finished, heaven be praised!

The attendant had gathered up the chips. Most of them, Paul thought, were hers. The *caissier* had locked his cash-box. A hurried, eager end was being made to a dismal season. Lefèvre had been called to Monte Carlo where he would make his cool, alert way from a lesser table to a salon privé. But Paul Mersier had no further destination. He was finished.

Not by age. He saw himself in the gilt-framed, smoky mirror opposite. In the still excellent evening clothes his was a compact and vigorous figure. The grey in the crisp black hair added distinction and authority to the clean-cut features.

He was in his best years. But he had begun to make mistakes. He never admitted them. But there had been angry, justified protests. Such things were whispered from municipality to municipality. From Deauville and Biarritz he had sunk to this shabby, obscure watering-place. Now even the summons to one of the smaller Mediterranean resorts had failed him.

" Well, my friend, where are you bound? "

" Limbo," Paul said, cool and unsmiling.

It was his hand. The two missing fingers had done more than make him clumsy. Their loss had hurt his brain. It moved too slowly. It had become at once inattentive and too much aware. He remembered how, after some glaring error, he had sat back, contemptuous of the howling, threatening pack, outwardly implacable and self-assured, but inwardly a turmoil of bewilderment and fear, and had seen the woman opposite glance at his left hand, which for once he had forgotten to hide, and then straight into his face. It was not a compassion that he could have rejected. It was an understanding that pierced his armour like a spear-point.

He had become vulnerable.

" Well, good luck, Mersier! "

" Do you and I believe in luck? " Paul tossed back ironically.

He made his way across the melancholy, deserted park to the Casino gates whose lights, as though they had waited for him, instantly went out, leaving him to the half-obscurity of the street. The damp ate into his bones. Yet the prospective shelter of his lodging-house room appalled him. He knew he would not sleep. He would stare at the dirty ceiling, at the familiar crack, tracing in its meaningless wandering the futile course of his own life.

So he came, without knowing why, to the bridge that crossed the deep turbulent river that encircled the little town like a furious, unsleeping guardian. Under the one light he saw that he was not alone. He had learnt to recognize the bearing of a final despair.

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He hurried to her, laying a maimed hand on the thin, childish shoulder.

"No," he said. "One doesn't do things like that—not here. The place is too small. It doesn't lend itself to tragedies."

She turned, not fighting him, just helplessly. Her face, under the light, looked bloodless. He glanced about him. He had heard the footfalls of authority, leisurely but ominous. He slipped his arm about her waist, supporting her, forcing her to walk with him. The gendarme's eyes, deep-shadowed by his kepi, considered them doubtfully. They were, it would seem, lovers. Middle-aged lovers, oblivious of cold and darkness. But then love, as he knew, could strike anyone, at any time.

"Good night, officer."

"Good night, Monsieur."

He still held her hard against his side. "I've saved that poor devil from a ducking—perhaps from drowning. You might have thought of that."

Her ghostly little sigh fanned his cheek. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to harm anyone. But there was nowhere else to go."

For the first time in all the years he heard her voice. But he had known that it would be warm and low-pitched. She spoke French correctly. The foreign accent, for once, did not offend him. It sounded only touching.

"You could have gone back."

"Where?"

"To your hotel. You must live somewhere."

But then, as her gentle withdrawal told him, there is no such "must" in life. She said at last, patiently, "I have no money. I left my things at the station. If I had won—but I didn't win—"

"How foolish! There are always ways. You must have friends!"

Again that idiotic "must"—that futile denial of despair. He heard himself then, with astonishment, almost with resentment, as though some stranger had sprung up at his elbow, speaking for him: "I have a landlady who will shrug her shoulders at the two of us. She accepts all men as predatory scoundrels. Do you? Or do you, sometimes, trust them?"

"I don't know—" She added, like an exhausted child, "I know so little."

The room had not even the character of ugliness. Like all the rooms in which he had slept away his private life, it had the furtive anonymity of drab, well-kept secrets. He lit the battered, wood-burning stove and fed it recklessly, and it began to glow like a reviving heart. He made his companion sit in his one arm-

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chair, close to the warmth. There was a carafe of red wine in his cupboard. He filled a glass for her.

" Drink that. You will feel better."

" But I haven't eaten—for a long time."

" Splendid. You will become a little drunk. Sometimes it is good to be a little drunk. It helps to see things—not as they really are."

Somewhere she had learnt obedience. She sat stiffly, her head bowed over the glass which she held like a chalice between her hands. The colour of the wine crept into her cheeks, hollowed under the high cheek-bones. Her eyes, when at last she raised them to meet his, were singularly tranquil, like those of someone who, having come to the end of the road, has nothing more to fear. " You're very kind," she said.

He shrugged. " You misjudge me. It is the sacred duty of croupiers to prevent such follies. They are bad for business."

" No—you are kind." She could be gently stubborn.

He asked ironically, " How did you find me out? "

" I've often watched you. Tonight it hurt you to take away all I had."

He refilled her glass. He had felt the troubled blood darken his sallow cheeks. But the poor, dirty, shaded light overhead would not betray him.

" Croupiers cannot indulge in kindness—or in pain. That, no doubt, is why I have ceased to be one. As from tonight."

" But why? " Her eyes had filled with a puzzled self-forgetting trouble. " You are so quick—so confident. When someone tried to cheat—even to defy you—you were always too clever and too strong for him. It helped me—just to watch you! " She hesitated, seeking words. " It was like being a poor swimmer and seeing someone very strong swimming beside you."

" But not to save you," he told her roughly.

" Somehow that didn't matter—" She stumbled into confusion. " It was just the strength that comforted me."

He became obscurely angry—with her, himself, his whole life.

" Didn't you notice, my observant friend, that I had begun to make mistakes? It is true that I had become aware of you—that I wanted you to win. From there on it was just a step to becoming aware of all the others—the cheats, the down-and-outs—the whole wretched, deluded crowd." He added with a sudden gentleness, " Don't worry. Old croupiers fade away. But they are not gamblers. They never starve. That, too, would be bad business."

" So you will go home." She used the English term, explaining shyly, " In French, you have no word for it."

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"We have the substance," he told her. "We have a 'chez moi' and that is good, too." He looked about him, as though seeing the place for the first time. "This is my 'chez moi.' There are rooms like this everywhere—at Deauville, Le Touquet, Biarritz." He made an involuntary gesture of a remembered pride. "In my best days I was at Monte Carlo. I took my father's place. He trained me for it. Croupiers are like hangmen's sons. It's a hereditary job."

He frowned past her, into the shadow, seeing there the green-baize table that his father had set up in their own living-room. It had faced the sea, but the curtains were drawn against it, against the stars, against the sun. He saw his father's swift white hands. He heard the passionless voice, the classic pronouncements: "*Messieurs, faites vos jeux! Les jeux sont faits. Rien ne va plus.*" His mother sat apart, outside the pool of crude white light, her hands folded in her lap. Strong peasant hands that had lost their purpose. "You must learn to feel nothing and to show nothing," his father had said. And had fitted a mask to his son's face. After a while the son forgot to take it off. It was easier to hide behind it. In the end the face behind it had nothing left to hide.

His brooding eyes came back to his companion. In all outer details he already knew her well enough. The simple "tailleur" was shabby. But it had been expensive.

As though she had felt the unspoken question, she answered it: "When my people died, I was left very poor. A rich friend asked me to come to France as her companion. These are her clothes."

"It's not easy to be poor among the rich."

"No! But I'd stayed home to help my mother. I'd had no training. I'm not clever. Sometimes I'm very stupid—"

"Even the stupid need happiness."

"She has been patient . . . " She amended earnestly, "As patient as the rich can be with the poor. It isn't easy for them, either."

"You are an American?"

"Yes. But we've never gone back. She hates our country."

"I know the breed. But you came here—to this dump—alone—"

Her face was bowed over her glass. "Every year she gives me three weeks. I'm free— "

"—To play your precious little system. The five *en plein*—it failed you often enough—"

"I thought—perhaps—it would be my lucky number. Once, when I was a child, a relative left us a little money. My father sent Mamma and me to the coast—for a whole summer. I'd never

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been happy like that before. I've never forgotten it. I was five years old." She added wistfully, "Even at thirty-five one can be foolish."

"One does not grow wiser—only wearier," he told her roughly. "Next year you will come back. They all do. You will become like them—"

"No." She lifted to him a look of unclouded honesty. "For me, it's finished. I've always hated it. But prisoners have a right to take a chance, haven't they? I needed so little. I thought that I might win enough . . ."

She was smiling faintly. He guessed that she had half forgotten him. The glow in the hollow cheeks was the glow of a dear, remembered dream.

"A place of my own. A cottage somewhere—just perhaps what we call a shack at home—but with a little land that I could make into a garden. I'm good with growing things. And—and a dog. Someone who would watch at the window for me and be glad when I came home—someone I could love. Some years I did make a little. I saved it. I came back—"

"For more? Didn't you know that the end is always the same? Did no one tell you that these places do not run to benefit the hungry and the homeless? Besides, boule is a child's game. You cannot even *lose* a fortune!"

He remembered that she had lost hers. The way to escape was cut finally. He could have told her, "The Casino will pay your return fare." But a return to what? He was silent.

He took her empty glass. She touched his broken hand. It was almost a caress—at once childlike and maternal.

"How cruelly they hurt you!"

So somehow she knew. Not everything. He could not himself afford to remember how "they" had slowly, deliberately crushed those fingers so that they could never serve him again. That day his mask had stood him in good stead. "They" had not broken him. But he had learnt suffering.

"That is what men do to each other," he said. "We are so civilized."

"You were in the Resistance?"

"Three years."

"Then you too came back—here?"

"Why not?" He jerked his head at the room. "I had slept in sewers—like a hunted rat. This seemed good enough. There was nowhere else."

But there had been somewhere else. He remembered it with a poignant clarity. His mother's home on the green, winding Dordogne—a summer spent there, fishing, swimming, helping

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with the harvest. His own brief, radiant childhood. Later his uncle had written: *Come home, Paul. We need young hands.* But not a croupier's white, predatory hands . . .

He found himself telling her of that summer. It was as though, since she had evoked it, the memory belonged to her.

" My mother died in exile. The house, I'm told, stands empty. There's no one left."

" You are left," she told him, almost sternly.

" No. In my profession one dies young."

" The dead could not do what you have tried to do for me."

What had he done? Obeyed the code of his order—or perhaps a blind, surviving instinct? He had blocked a last way of escape, bringing her to this bleak oasis, knowing of no other place of safety for her. You laid hands on a life and it became your own. You could not let it go. It could not let you go. With a despairing protest he realized that what he had believed mercifully burnt to dust and ashes was alive and aching.

" My poor, foolish friend—I *am* dead. I've been dead for years. Don't try to resurrect the dead. You might find yourself haunted by a ghost."

She had to believe. He had to make her understand. It was as though he knelt before a forgotten chest and unpacked all its dusty, withered memories—the years of remorseless training for a life as stern as, less human than that of a Trappist monk—the nights spent in the sick glare of a green table, the encircling faces of the greedy, the silly, the obsessed, the damned—the days slept away behind curtains drawn against the sun, the sea, the laughter and loving of ordinary men.

" For weeks I never saw the daylight. I grew to dread it. It blinded me."

" It is still there," she told him gravely. " It is so warm and kind."

He laughed at her. But his throat ached. He saw that her head rested against the high back of her chair in surrender to utter weariness. Two slow tears were drying on her cheeks. It was strange that now he could accept the gift of her compassion. He bent down and touched her cheek.

" I think I *am* a little drunk."

" You are very tired. The journey has been too long."

He seemed to obey a will superimposed upon his own. He lifted her to his bed and covered her with his coat. " Sleep well, poor friend."

He sat beside her, his arms folded, and watched her sink deeper and deeper into forgetfulness. When the fire burnt low, he quietly rekindled it, and there was no sound but the crackling of

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the wood, and her quiet breathing. She must awake to warmth. It was rekindling in himself, and things long held in a black frost were melting. They hurt, grinding against each other in the gathering torrent of release. But he was glad to suffer. The room, in the ruddy twilight, had lost its hideousness. It had become, magically, a quiet shelter, a place of refuge.

Presently he too slept—not deeply, so that dreams and things remembered were interwoven; the house at the river's edge, the reflection of willows on the gently flowing water, the sound of calm, friendly voices. *We need your hands, Paul.*

He woke fully to look down at his strong, broken, suffering hands.

He went softly to the window and drew aside the threadbare curtains. It was so long since he had seen the sunrise. It was as she had said—the light was warm and kind. It seeped into his blood. It was carried to his heart.

He had a sudden, laughing thought. Presently, when the shops opened, he would run down to the *boulangerie.* He would ask Madame Richard for four golden croissants, and she would shake a maternal reproof at him.

" Monsieur is growing greedy."

" Madame, I have a friend."

Her black eyes would twinkle. " Aha, Monsieur! "

Suppose he told her, " I don't even know her name."

She would laugh again.

He turned quickly, knowing by his quickened heartbeat that she had wakened. She rested on her elbow, looking at him. It was as though, rising out of the black depths of sleep, she asked him, *Who are you? Who am I? Where are we two going?*

It was strange that in the clear daylight she should look so young. Not beautiful. But dearly, deeply familiar.

He came and knelt beside her. He took her hand and laid it against his cheek, warming it. He kissed it gently.

" You and I," he said, " at long last are going home."

* * *

STRIKING LIKENESS

I once saw an eight-year-old great-nephew of Henry James, suddenly and with no provocation whatever, give his younger sister a good blow in the face.

When gravely asked, " Why did you do that? " he replied as gravely, " An irresistible impulse, Father."

WITTER BYNNER, *Journey with Genius*

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A PROSPECT OF FLOWERS

The world's a garden;
pleasures are the flowers

JOSHUA SYLVESTER,
Hortus, 1621

When she rises in the morning
I linger to watch her;
She spreads the bath-cloth underneath the window
And the sunbeams catch her
Glistening white on the shoulders,
While down her sides the mellow
Golden shadow glows as
She stoops to the sponge, and her swung breasts
Sway like full-blown yellow
Gloire de Dijon roses.

She drips herself with water, and her shoulders
Glisten as silver, they crumple up
Like wet and falling roses, and I listen
For the sluicing of their rain-dishevelled petals.
In the window full of sunlight
Concentrates her golden shadow
Fold on fold, until it glows as
Mellow as the glory roses.

D. H. LAWRENCE,
Gloire de Dijon

Blown Petals

The monk played his flute while he walked; its sound was very plaintive. He walked down the hill, and wandered into a distant forest while the moon was hidden by some clouds. We heard him still playing his flute, and while its sound gradually grew fainter, it was more pathetic.

Before going to bed, Eighth Sister told me to write some words in her letter to Mother, and she expected to post it next morning.

I wrote about what we saw in the night; then I said:

"I think the monk played the flute very well. He must be a great musician disguising himself as a monk."

Eighth Sister did not answer me; she looked very sad. She sang in a low voice what used to be one of her favourite tunes . . .

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Flower, yet not a flower,
Mist, yet not a mist;
It comes at night and
Before dawn it goes away:
Like a dream in spring it never stays long,
As morning cloud vanishes without a trace.

I thought both the song and the tune were beautiful, though I did not quite understand what was its meaning at the time. She switched off the light. We were both lying on the bedding which was put on the Japanese tatami floor. The moonlight was drawing the shadow of the pear tree on the white wall opposite. The chilly night wind blew the lace curtain, and now and then carried some white petals into the room. For a long while I could not go to sleep; the sound of the flute haunted me.

SU HUA, *Ancient Melodies*

Blossom

I thought it snowed with plum blossom,
But I was wrong;
The flower snowstorm was this girl
Walking along.

From the Japanese,
by SIMON GROVE

Buttonhole

Once I must have had a cold or something that kept me from church . . . Father took me with him to get a new service from the Works and called on the way back at a small and dingy public house for a drink. As usual he had several beautiful rosebuds in his buttonhole and while I was feeling very grown up drinking fizzy lemonade made pink with a dash of claret, the barmaid expressed her approval of the roses. She was one of those statuesque jolly women with tiers of golden hair and a bust like a shelf.

"You can have them, duckie, if you let me pin them on for you," said Father, and proceeded to do it with much nudging and chuckling that ended in a mixture of dismay and good roaring laughter because half of the girl's bust had disappeared, deflated by the pin. I was terribly sorry for the girl and thought it was all disgraceful.

LEONORA EYLES, *The Ram Escapes*

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Red Red Rose

Ah for the red spring rose,
Down in the garden growing,
Fading as fast as it blows,
Who shall arrest its going?
Peep from thy window and tell,
Fairest of flowers, Isabel.

Wither it would, but the bee
Over the blossom hovers,
And the sweet life ere it flee
With as sweet art recovers,
Sweetest at night in his cell,
Fairest of flowers, Isabel.

CALDERÓN, *The Mayor of Zalamea,*
translated by Edward Fitzgerald

Lilac Time

" Whom am I to live for, to what purpose? " he said, following her. " What am I to seek, to strive for, to dream about? The blossom of life has fallen, only the thorns are left."

They were walking slowly; she listened absent-mindedly, plucked a branch of lilac by the way, and gave it to him without looking.

" What is it? " he asked, taken aback.

" You see, it's a branch."

" What branch? " he asked, looking at her open-eyed.

" Lilac."

" I know . . . but what does it mean? "

" The flower of life . . . and . . ."

He stopped and she stopped too.

" And? " he repeated questioningly.

" My vexation," she said, looking straight at him, and her smile showed that she knew what she was doing. The impenetrable cloud around her had dispersed. The language of her eyes was clear . . . " Then I may hope . . ." he cried, suddenly flushing with joy . . .

He kept glancing stealthily and with delight at her face, her curls, her figure, and convulsively grasped the lilac branch.

" Life and hope once more! " he repeated dreamily, unable to believe it.

IVAN ALEXANDROVITCH GONCHAROV, *Oblomov,*
translated by Natalie Duddington

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★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

THE IMPACTED MAN

Staring blankly at the impossibility of the thing, Masrin screamed

by ROBERT SHECKLEY

To: Centre, Office 41 (*attn.* Controller Miglese)
From: Contractor Carienomen
Subj: ATTALA METAGALAXY

Dear Controller Miglese: This is to inform you that I have now completed contract 13371A. In the region of space coded ATTALA I have constructed one metagalaxy, incorporating 549 billion galaxies, with the normal distribution of star-clusters, variables, novae, etc. See attached data sheet.

The outer limits of ATTALA metagalaxy are defined in the accompanying map.

Speaking for myself, as chief designer, and for my company, I am confident that we have done a sound construction job, as well as a work of great artistic merit.

We welcome your inspection.

The terms of our contract having been fulfilled, the agreed fee is payable at any time.

Respectfully,
Carienomen

Encl: 1 data sheet, installations
1 map of metagalaxy ATTALA

To: Construction Headquarters 334132, Ext. 12
(*attn.* Chief Designer Carienomen)
From: Asst. Controller Miglese
Subj: ATTALA METAGALAXY

Dear Carienomen: We have inspected your construction, and have held up your fee accordingly.

Artistic! I suppose it's artistic. But haven't you forgotten our prime concern in construction work? Consistency, just to remind you.

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Our inspectors discovered large amounts of unexplained data occurring even around the metagalactic centre, a region one would have thought you would build with care. That can't go on. Luckily, the region is unpopulated.

And that's not all. Would you care to explain your spatial phenomena? What in chaos is this red shift you've built in? I've read your explanation of it, and it doesn't make any sense to me. How will planetary observers take it? Artistry is no excuse.

Furthermore, what kinds of atom are you using?

Carienomen, are you trying to save money with shoddy materials? A good percentage of those atoms was unstable! They break down at the touch of a finger, or even without the touch of a finger. Couldn't you work out any other way of lighting your suns?

Enclosed is a data sheet, outlining the findings of our inspectors. No payment until they're cleared up.

And there is another serious matter, just brought to my attention. Evidently you weren't watching too closely for stresses and strains in your spatial fabric. We have detected a time-flaw near the periphery of one of your galaxies. It is small, at present, but it *could* grow. I suggest that you take care of it at once, before you have to rebuild a galaxy or two.

One of the inhabitants of a planet impinging on the flaw is impacted already; wedged into the flaw, due entirely to your carelessness. I suggest that you correct this before he moves out of his normal time-sequence, creating paradoxes to right and left.

Get in touch with him, if need be.

Also, I have word of unexplained phenomena on some of your planets; items such as flying pigs, moving mountains, ghosts, and others, all enumerated in the complaint sheet.

We won't have this sort of thing, Carienomen. A paradox is strictly forbidden in the created galaxies, since a paradox is the inevitable forerunner of chaos.

Take care of that impaction at once. I don't know whether the impacted individual realizes it yet.

Miglese

Encl: 1 complaint sheet

Kay Masrin folded the last blouse into the suitcase and, with her husband's assistance, closed it.

"That's that," Jack Masrin said, hoisting the bulging case. "Say good-bye to the old homestead." They looked around at the furnished room where they had spent their last year.

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"Good-bye, homestead," Kay said. "Let's not miss the train."

"Plenty of time." Masrin started to the door. "Shall we say good-bye to Happy Boy?" They had given Mr. Harff, their landlord, that nickname because he smiled once a month—when they handed him the rent. Of course, he immediately reshaped his mouth to its usual prim line.

"Let's not," Kay said, smoothing out her tailored suit. "He just might wish us luck, and what would happen then?"

"You're perfectly right," Masrin said. "No use starting a new life with Happy Boy's blessings. I'd rather have the Witch of Endor curse me."

With Kay following him, Masrin walked to the head of the stairs. He looked down at the first-floor landing, started to take the first step, and stopped abruptly.

"What's wrong?" Kay asked.

"Have we forgotten anything?" Masrin asked, frowning.

"I checked all the drawers and under the bed. Come on, we'll be late."

Masrin looked down the stairs again. Something was bothering him. He searched quickly for the source of the trouble. Of course, they had practically no money. But that had never worried him in the past. He *did* have a teaching job, finally, even if it was in Iowa. That was the important thing, after a year of working in a bookshop. Everything was going right. Why should he be worried?

He took a step down, and stopped again. The feeling was stronger. There was something he shouldn't do. He glanced back at Kay.

"Do you hate leaving as much as all that?" Kay asked. "Let's go, or Happy Boy'll charge us another month's rent. Which, for some strange reason, we haven't got."

Still Masrin hesitated. Kay pushed past him and trotted downstairs. "See?" she said from the first-floor landing. "It's easy. Come on. Come to Mummy."

Masrin mumbled a few subdued curses and started down the stairs. The feeling became stronger. He reached the eighth step, and—

He was standing on a grassy plain. The transition was as sudden as that.

He gasped and blinked. The suitcase was still in his hand. But where was the brownstone house? Where was Kay? Where, for that matter, was New York? In the distance was a small blue mountain. There was a clump of trees near by. In front of the clump were a dozen or so men.

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Masrin was in a dreamlike state of shock. He observed, almost idly, that the men were short, swarthy, and thickly muscled. They were wearing fur pelts, and carried beautifully carved and polished clubs.

They were watching him, and Masrin decided it was a toss-up who was the more surprised. Then one of them grunted something, and they started moving towards him.

A club bounced off his suitcase.

The shock dissolved. Masrin turned, dropped the suitcase, and ran like a greyhound. A club whacked his spine, nearly knocking him over. There was a little hill ahead, and he bounded up it, arrows showering around him.

A few feet up, he realized that he was back in New York. He was at the top of the stairs, still in full stride, and before he could stop himself he had run into the wall.

Kay was on the first-floor landing, looking up. She gasped when she saw him, but didn't say anything.

Masrin looked at the familiar murky, mauve walls of the brownstone house, and at his wife.

No savages.

"What happened?" Kay whispered, white-faced, coming up the stairs.

"What did *you* see?" Masrin asked. He didn't have a chance to feel the full impact of what had happened. Ideas were pouring into his head, theories, conclusions.

Kay hesitated, gnawing at her lower lip. "You walked down a couple of steps and then you were gone. I couldn't see you any more. I just stood there and looked and looked. And then I heard a noise, and you were back on the stairs. Running."

They walked back to their room and opened the door. Kay sat down at once on the bed. Masrin walked round, catching his breath. Ideas were still pouring in, and he was having trouble sifting them.

"You won't believe me," he said.

"Oh, won't I? Try me!"

He told her about the savages.

"You could tell me you were on Mars," Kay said. "I'd believe you. I saw you disappear!"

"My suitcase!" Masrin said suddenly, remembering that he had dropped it.

"Forget the suitcase," Kay said.

"I have to go back for it," Masrin said.

"No!"

"I must. Look, dear, it's pretty obvious what happened. I walked through some sort of time-flaw, which sent me back to

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the past. I must have landed in prehistoric times, to judge by the welcoming committee I met. I have to go back for that suitcase."

"Why?" Kay asked.

"Because I can't allow a paradox to occur." Masrin didn't even wonder how he knew this. His normal egotism saved him from wondering how the idea had originated in his mind.

"Look," he said, "my suitcase lands in the past. In it I've got an electric shaver, a plastic hairbrush, a nylon shirt, and a dozen or so books—some of them published as late as 1953. I've even got Ettison's *Western Ways* in there, a text on western civilization from 1490 to the present day. The contents of that case could give these savages the impetus to change their own history. And suppose some of that stuff were to get into the hands of Europeans, after they discover America? How would that affect the present?"

"I don't know," Kay said. "And you don't, either."

"Of course I know," Masrin said. It was all crystal-clear. He was amazed that she wasn't able to follow it logically.

"Look at it this way," Masrin said. "Minutiae make history. The present is made up of a tremendous number of infinitesimal factors that shaped and moulded the past. If you add another factor to the past, you're bound to get another result in the present. But the present is as it is, unchangeable. So we have a paradox. And there can't be any paradox!"

"Why can't there be?" Kay asked.

Masrin frowned. For a bright girl, she was following him very poorly. "Just believe me," he said. "Paradox isn't allowed in a logical universe." Allowed by whom? He had the answer.

"The way I see it," Masrin said, "there must be a regulating principle in the universe. All our natural laws are expressions of it. This principle can't tolerate paradox, because . . . because—" He knew that the answer had to do with suppressing the fundamental chaos, but he didn't know why. "Anyhow, this principle can't tolerate paradox."

"Where did you get that idea?" Kay asked. She had never heard Jack talk that way before.

"I've had these ideas for a long time," Masrin said, and believed it. "There was just never any reason to talk about it. And now I'm going back for my suitcase."

He walked out to the landing, followed by Kay. "Sorry I can't bring you any souvenirs," Masrin said cheerfully. "Unfortunately, that would result in a paradox also. Everything in the past has had a part in shaping the present. Remove something, and it's like removing one unknown from an equation.

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You wouldn't get the same result." He started down the stairs.

On the eighth step, he disappeared again . . .

He was back in prehistoric America. The savages were gathered round the suitcase, only a few feet from him. They hadn't opened it yet, Masrin noticed thankfully. Of course, the suitcase itself was a pretty paradoxical article. But its appearance—and his—would probably be swallowed up in myth and legend. Time had a certain amount of flexibility.

Looking at them, Masrin couldn't decide if they were forerunners of Indians, or a separate subrace which wouldn't survive. He wondered if they thought he was an enemy, or a garden-variety evil spirit.

Masrin darted forward, shoved two of them aside, and grabbed his suitcase. He ran back, circling the little hill, and stopped.

He was still in the past.

Where in chaos was that hole in time, Masrin wondered, not noticing the strangeness of his oath. The savages were coming after him now, starting round the little hill. Masrin almost had the answer, then lost it as an arrow sped past him. He sprinted, trying to keep the hill between himself and the Indians. His long legs pumped, and a club bounced behind him.

Where was that hole in time? What if it had moved? Perspiration poured from his face as he ran. A club grazed his arm, and he twisted round the side of the hill, looking wildly for shelter.

He met three squat savages, coming after him. Masrin fell to the ground as they swung their clubs, and they tripped over his body. Others were coming now, and he jumped to his feet.

Up! The thought struck him suddenly, cutting through his fear. Up! He charged the hill, certain that he would never reach the top alive . . .

And then he was back in the boarding-house, still holding the suitcase.

"Are you hurt, darling?" Kay put her arms round him. "What happened?"

Masrin had only one rational thought. He couldn't remember any prehistoric tribe that carved their clubs as elaborately as these savages. It was almost a unique art form, and he wished he could get one of the clubs to a museum.

Then he looked at the mauve walls wildly, expecting to see the savages come bounding out of them. Or perhaps there were little men in his suitcase. He fought for control. The thinking portion of his mind told him not to be alarmed; flaws in time were possible, and he had become wedged, impacted in one. Everything else followed logically. All he had to do—

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But another part of his mind wasn't interested in logic. It had been staring blankly at the impossibility of the whole thing, uninfluenced by any rational arguments. That part knew an impossibility when it saw one, and said so.

Masrin screamed and fainted.

To: Centre, Office 41 (*attn.* Asst. Controller Miglese)
From: Contractor Carienomen
Subj: ATTALA METAGALAXY

Dear Sir: I consider your attitude unfair.

True, I have utilized some new ideas in my approach to this particular metagalaxy. I have allowed myself the latitude of artistry, never thinking I would be beset by the howls of a static, reactionary Centre.

Believe me, I am as interested as you in our great job—that of suppressing the fundamental chaos. But in doing this, we must not sacrifice our values.

Enclosed is a statement in defence of my use of the red shift, and another statement of the advantages gained by using a small percentage of unstable atoms for lighting and energy purposes.

As to the time-flaw, that was merely a small error in duration-flow, and has nothing to do with the fabric of space, which is, I assure you, of first-rate quality.

There is, as you pointed out, an individual impacted in the flaw, which makes the job of repair slightly more difficult. I have been in contact with him, indirectly, of course, and have succeeded in giving him a limited understanding of his role.

If he doesn't disturb the flaw too much by time-travelling, I should be able to sew it up with little difficulty. I don't know if this procedure is possible, though. My rapport with him is quite shaky, and he seems to have a number of strong influences around him, counselling him to move.

I could perform an extraction, of course, and ultimately I may have to do just that.

For that matter, if the thing gets out of hand I may be forced to extract the entire planet. I hope not, since that would necessitate clearing that entire portion of space, where there are also local observers. This, in turn, might necessitate rebuilding an entire galaxy.

However, I hope to have the problem settled by the time I next communicate with you.

The warp in the metagalactic centre was caused by some workmen leaving a transfer unit open. It has been closed.

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The phenomena such as walking mountains, etc., are being handled in the usual way.

Payment is still due on my work.

Respectfully,
Carienomen

Encl: 1 statement, 5541 pages, Red Shift
1 statement, 7689 pages, Unstable Atoms

To: Construction Headquarters 334132
(*attn.* Contractor Carienomen)
From: Asst. Controller Miglese
Subj: ATTALA METAGALAXY

You will be paid *after* you can show me a logical, decently constructed job. I'll read your statements when and if I have time. Take care of the flaw-impaction before it tears a hole in the fabric of space.

Miglese

Masrin recovered his nerve in half an hour. Kay put a compress on a purple bruise on his arm. Masrin started pacing the room. Once again, he was in complete possession of his faculties. Ideas began to come. "The past is down," he said, half to Kay, half to himself. "I don't mean really 'down,' but when I move in that apparent direction, I step through the hole in time. It's a case of shifted, conjoined dimensionality."

"What does that mean?" Kay asked, staring wide-eyed.

"Just take my word for it," Masrin said, "I can't go down." He couldn't explain it to her any better. There weren't words to fit the concepts.

"Can you go up?" Kay asked, completely confused.

"I don't know. I suppose, if I went up, I'd go into the future."

"Oh, I can't stand it," Kay said. "What's wrong with you? How will you get out of here? How will you get down that haunted staircase?"

"Are you people still there?" Mr. Harff's voice croaked from outside. Masrin walked over and opened the door.

"I think we're going to stay for a while," he said.

"You're not," Harff said. "I've already let this room again." Happy Boy Harff was small and bony, with a narrow skull and lips as thin as a spider's thread. He stalked into the room, looking round for signs of damage to his property. One of Mr. Harff's little idiosyncrasies was his belief that the nicest people were capable of the worst crimes.

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"When are the people coming?" Masrin asked.

"This afternoon. And I want you out before they get here."

"Couldn't we make some arrangement?" Masrin asked. The impossibility of the situation struck him. He couldn't go downstairs. If Harff forced him out, he would have to go to prehistoric New York, where he was sure his return was eagerly awaited.

And there was the over-all problem of paradox!

"I'm ill," Kay said in a stifled little voice. "I can't leave yet."

"What's the matter with you? I'll call an ambulance if you're ill," Harff said, looking suspiciously around the room for any signs of bubonic plague.

"I'd gladly pay you double the rent if you'd let us stay a little longer," Masrin said.

Harff scratched his head, and stared at Masrin. He wiped his nose on the back of his hand, and said, "Where's the money?"

Masrin realized that he had about ten dollars left, and his train tickets. He and Kay were going to ask for an advance as soon as they reached the college.

"Broke," Harff said. "I thought you had a job at some school?"

"He has," Kay said staunchly.

"Then why don't you go there and get out of my place?" Harff asked.

The Masrins were silent. Harff glared at them. "Very suspicious. Get out before noon, or I'll call a cop."

"Hold it," Masrin said. "We've paid the rent for today. The room's ours until midnight."

Harff stared at them. He wiped his nose again, thoughtfully. "Don't try staying one minute over," he said, stamping out of the room.

As soon as Harff was gone, Kay hurried across and closed the door. "Honey," she said, "why don't you call up some scientists here in New York and tell them what's happened? I'm sure they'd arrange something, until . . . how long shall we have to stay here?"

"Until the flaw's repaired," Masrin said. "But we can't tell anyone; especially, we can't tell any scientists."

"Why not?" Kay asked.

"Look, the important thing, as I told you, is to avoid a paradox. That means I have to keep my hands off the past and the future. Right?"

"If you say so," Kay said.

"We call in a team of scientists, and what happens? Naturally,

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they're sceptical. They want to *see* me do it. So I do it. Immediately, they bring in their colleagues. *They* watch me disappear. Understand, all this time there's no proof that I've gone into the past. All they know is, if I walk downstairs, I disappear.

" Photographers are called in, to make sure I'm not hypnotizing the scientists. Then they demand proof. They want me to bring back a scalp, or one of those carved clubs. The newspapers get hold of it. It's inevitable that somewhere along the line I produce a paradox. And do you know what happens then? "

" No, and you don't, either."

" I do," Masrin said firmly. " Once a paradox is caused, the agent—the man who caused it—me—disappears. For good. And it goes down in the books as another unsolved mystery. Like that, the paradox is resolved in the easiest way—by getting rid of the paradoxical element."

" If you think you're in danger, then of course we shan't call in any scientists," Kay said. " Although I wish I knew what you were driving at. I don't understand anything you've said." She went to the window and looked out. There was New York, and beyond it, somewhere, was Iowa, where they should be going. She looked at her watch. They had already missed the train.

" Phone the college," Masrin said. " Tell them I'll be delayed a few days."

" Will it be only a few days? " Kay asked. " How will you ever get out? "

" Oh, the hole in time isn't permanent," Masrin said confidently. " It'll heal—if I don't go sticking myself in it."

" But we can't stay here after midnight. What happens then? "

" I don't know," Masrin said. " We can only hope it'll be put right by then."

To: Centre, Office 41 (*attn.* Asst. Controller Miglese)
From: Contractor Carienomen
Subj: MORSTT METAGALAXY

Dear Sir: Enclosed herewith is my tender for work on the new metagalaxy in the region coded MORSTT.

If you have heard any discussions in art circles recently, you will know that my use of unstable atoms in ATTALA metagalaxy has been proclaimed " the first great advance in creative engineering since the invention of variable time-flow." See the enclosed reviews.

My artistry has stirred many favourable comments.

Most of the inconsistencies—*natural* inconsistencies, let me remind you—in ATTALA metagalaxy have been corrected. I

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am still working with the man impacted in the time-flow. He is proving quite co-operative; at least, as co-operative as he can be, with the various influences round him.

To date, I have coalesced the edges of the flaw and am allowing them to harden. I hope the individual remains immobile, since I am most reluctant to extract anyone or anything. After all, each person, each planet, each star system, no matter how minute, has an integral part in my metagalactic scheme. Artistically, at any rate.

Your inspection is welcomed again. Please note the galactic configurations around the metagalactic centre. They are a dream of beauty you will wish to carry with you always.

Please consider my bid for the MORSTT metagalaxy project in the light of my past achievements.

Payment is still due on ATTALA metagalaxy.

Respectfully,

Carienomen

Encl: 1 tender, for MORSTT metagalaxy project
3 critical reviews, ATTALA metagalaxy

" It's a quarter to twelve, honey," Kay said nervously. " Do you think we could go now? "

" Let's wait a few minutes longer," Masrin said. He could hear Harff prowling round on the landing, waiting eagerly for the dot of twelve.

Masrin watched the seconds tick by on his watch. At five minutes to twelve, he decided that he might as well find out. If the hole wasn't fixed by now, another five minutes wouldn't do it. He placed the suitcase on the chest, and moved a chair next to it.

" What are you doing? " Kay asked.

" I don't feel like trying those stairs at night," Masrin said. " It's bad enough playing with those pre-Indians in the daylight. I intend to try going up, instead." His wife gave him an under-the-eyelids, now-I-know-you're-cracking-up look.

" It's not the staircase that does it," Masrin told her again. " It's the act of going up or down. The critical distance seems to be about five feet. This will do just as well."

Kay stood nervously, clenching and unclenching both hands, as Masrin climbed on the chair and put one foot on the chest. Then the other, and he stood up.

" I think it's all right," he said, teetering a little. " I'm going to try it a little higher." He climbed on the suitcase.

And disappeared . . .

It was daylight, and he was in a city. But the city didn't look like New York. It was breath-takingly beautiful—so beautiful

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that Masrin didn't dare breathe, for fear of disturbing its fragile loveliness.

It was a place of delicate, wispy towers and buildings. And people. But what people, Masrin thought, letting out his breath with a sigh.

The people were blue-skinned. The light was green, coming from a green-tinged sun.

Masrin drew in a breath of air, and strangled. He gasped again, and started to lose his balance. There was no air in the place—at least, no air he could breathe. He felt for a step behind him, and then tumbled down—

To land, choking and writhing, on the floor of his room.

After a few moments he could breathe again. He heard Harff pounding on the door. Masrin staggered to his feet, and tried to think of something. He knew Harff—the man was probably certain by now that Masrin headed the Mafia. He would call a cop if they didn't leave. And that would ultimately result in . . .

"Listen," he said to Kay, "I've got another idea." His throat was burning from the atmosphere of the future. However, he told himself, there was no reason why he should be surprised. He had made quite a jump forward. The composition of the Earth's atmosphere must have changed, gradually, and the people had adapted to it. But it was a poison for him.

"There are two possibilities now," he said to Kay. "One, that under the prehistoric layer is another, earlier layer. Two, that the prehistoric layer is only a temporary discontinuity, and under it is present-day New York again. Follow me?"

"No."

"I'm going to try getting under the prehistoric layer. It might get me down to the ground floor. Certainly, it can't be any worse."

Kay considered the logic of going some thousands of years into the past in order to walk ten feet, but didn't say anything. Masrin opened the door and went out to the stairs, followed by Kay. "Wish me luck," he said.

"Luck, nothing," Mr. Harff said, on the landing. "Just get out of here."

Masrin plunged down the stairs . . .

It was still morning in prehistoric New York, and the savages were still waiting for him. Masrin estimated that only about half an hour had gone by here. He didn't have time to wonder why.

He had caught them by surprise, and was twenty yards away before they saw him. They followed, and Masrin looked for a depression. He had to go down five feet, in order to get out. He found a shelving of the ground, and jumped down.

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He was in water. Not just on the surface, but *under*. The pressure was tremendous, and Masrin could not see sunlight above him. He must have gone through to a time when this section was under the Atlantic.

Masrin kicked furiously, ear-drums bursting. He started to rise towards the surface, and—

He was back on the plain, dripping wet.

This time, the savages had had enough. They looked at him, materialized in front of them, gave a shriek of horror, and bolted. This water-sprite was too strong for them.

Wearily, Masrin walked back to the hill, climbed it, and was once again in the brownstone house.

Kay was staring at him, and Harff's jaw was hanging slack. Masrin grinned weakly.

" Mr. Harff," he said, " will you come into my room? There's something I want to tell you."

To: Centre, Office 41 (*attn.* Asst. Controller Miglese)
From: Contractor Carienomen
Subj: MORSTT METAGALAXY

Sir: I cannot understand your reply to my tender for the job of constructing MORSTT metagalaxy. Moreover, I do not think that abuse has any place in a business letter.

If you have taken the trouble to inspect my latest work in ATTALA, you will see that it is, taking it all in all, a beautiful job, and one that will go a long way towards holding back the fundamental chaos.

The only remaining detail requiring attention is the matter of the impacted man. I fear I shall have to extract.

The flaw was hardening nicely, when he blundered into it again, tearing it worse than ever. No paradox as yet, but I can see one coming.

Unless he can control his immediate environment, and do it at once, I shall take the necessary step. Paradox is *not* allowed.

I consider it my duty to ask you to reconsider my tender for the MORSTT metagalaxy project.

In conclusion, I trust you will excuse me for bringing this oversight to your attention, but payment is still due.

Respectfully,
Carienomen

" So that's the story, Mr. Harff," Masrin said, an hour later. " I know how weird it sounds, but, with your own eyes, you saw me disappear."

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"That I did," Harff said. Masrin went into the bathroom to hang up his wet clothes.

"Yes," Harff said, "I guess you disappeared, at that."

"I certainly did."

"And you don't want the scientists to know about your deal with the devil?" Harff asked slyly.

"No! I explained about paradox, and—"

"Let me see," Harff said. He wiped his nose vigorously. "Those carved clubs you said they had. Wouldn't one of those be valuable to a museum? You said nothing like it exists."

"What?" Masrin asked, coming out of the bathroom. "Listen, I can't touch any of that stuff. It'll result in—"

"Of course," Harff said, "I could call in some newspaper boys instead. And some scientists. I could probably make me a nice little pile out of this devil-worship."

"You wouldn't!" Kay exclaimed, remembering only that her husband had said something bad would happen.

"Be reasonable," Harff said. "All I want is one or two of those clubs. That won't cause any trouble. You can just ask your devil—"

"There's no devil involved," Masrin said. "You have no idea what part one of those clubs might have played in history. The club I take might be destined to kill the man who would unite these people, and, with him alive, the North American Indians might meet the Europeans as a single nation. Think how that would change—"

"Don't hand me that stuff," Harff said. "Are you getting me a club or aren't you?"

"I've explained it to you," Masrin said wearily.

"And don't tell me any more about this paradox business. I don't understand it, anyhow. But I'll split fifty-fifty with you on what I get for the club."

"No."

"O.K." Harff started for the door. "I'll be seeing you."

"Wait!"

"Yes?" Harff's thin, spidery mouth was smiling now.

Masrin examined his choice of evils. If he brought back a club there was a good chance of starting a paradox, by removing all that the club had done in the past. But if he didn't, Harff would call in the newspapers and scientists. They could find out if Harff was speaking the truth by simply taking himself downstairs; which the police would do anyhow. He would disappear, and then—with more people in on it, a paradox would be inevitable. And all Earth might, very possibly, be removed. Although he didn't know why, Masrin knew this for a certainty.

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He was lost either way, but getting the club seemed the simpler alternative. "I'll get it," Masrin said. He walked to the staircase, followed by Kay and Harff. Kay grabbed his hand.

"Don't do it," she said.

"There's nothing else I can do." He thought for a moment of killing Harff. But that would only result in the electric chair for him. Of course, he could kill Harff, take his body into the past and bury it.

But then the corpse of a twentieth-century man in prehistoric America might constitute a paradox anyhow. Suppose it was dug up? Besides, he didn't have it in him to kill a man.

Masrin kissed his wife, and walked downstairs . . .

There were no savages in sight on the plain, although Masrin thought he could feel their eyes watching him. He found two clubs on the ground. The ones that struck him must be taboo, he decided, and picked one up, expecting another to crush his skull any moment. But the plain was silent . . .

"Good boy!" Harff said. "Hand it here!"

Masrin handed him the club. He went over to Kay and put his arm round her. It was a paradox now, as certainly as if he had killed his great-great-grandfather before he was born.

"That's a lovely thing," Harff said, admiring the club under the light. "Consider your rent paid for the rest of the month—"

The club disappeared from his hand.

Harff disappeared.

Kay fainted. Masrin carried her to the bed, and splashed water on her face. "What happened?" she asked.

"I don't know," Masrin said, suddenly very puzzled about everything. "All I know is, we're going to stay here for at least two weeks. Even if we have to eat beans."

To: Centre, Office 41 (*attn.* Asst. Controller Miglese)
From: Contractor Carienomen
Subj: MORSTT METAGALAXY

Sir: Your offer of a job repairing damaged stars is an insult to my company and myself. We refuse. Let me point out my work in the past, outlined in the brochure I am enclosing. How can you offer so menial a job to one of Centre's greatest companies?

Again, I would like to put in my request for work on the new MORSTT metagalaxy.

As for ATTALA metagalaxy—the work is now completed, and a finer job cannot be found anywhere this side of chaos. The place is a wonder.

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The impacted man is no longer impacted. I was forced to extract. However, I did not extract the man himself. Instead, I was able to remove one of the external influences on him. Now he can grow out normally.

A neat job, I think you'll admit, and solved with the ingenuity that characterizes all my work.

My decision was: why extract a good man, when I could save him by pulling the rotten one beside him?

Again, I welcome your inspection. I request reconsideration on MORSTT metagalaxy.

Payment is still due!

Respectfully,
Carienomen

Encl: 1 brochure, 9978 pages

★ ★ ★

HAUNTED

Through the imponderable twilight tumbles
A fuzzy mass, uncertain at the edges.
This, so they tell me, is the ghost that grumbles,
The spectre that goes backwards through the hedges,

The goblin garrulous but rarely witty,
The harmless phantom and the wraith endearing,
That hops around and sings a tuneless ditty
And interrupts himself with bursts of cheering;

A spirit fairly lovable, and decent.
Some say he is the shade of Charles the Martyr;
Others incline to a demise more recent,
Claiming he is a Mr. Eustace Carter,

A man who flourished here in eighteen-fifty
And fell into a pond while trapping rabbits.
At all events, although a trifle shifty,
The spectre has few irritating habits,

Never comes after dark, but in the twilight,
And rarely frightens people, or not badly,
But sits in summer evenings on the skylight,
Scratching himself, and singing, rather sadly.

R. P. LISTER

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CHAFF IN THE WIND

Watching him, she moved from fire to fire, raking the yellow flags of flame

by H. E. BATES

SHE was burning chaff in three big yellow separate heaps as he came across the field. A flame was darting up and along the blue-black edge of each heap like lamp-wick, leaving smoking ash behind.

She stood leaning on the long white handle of a hay-fork, arms firm and crooked, hands just below her chin, eyes rather low on the three smoking heaps, as if she was not really watching him at all. The wind was cold for October. It blew in sudden ugly gusts, switching smoke over grey-yellow stubble in blue flat clouds that turned back and bit each other like dogs at play.

"Could you tell me which is Benacre?" he said.

Deliberately she drew the tines of the hay-fork down the curve of the nearest heap, dragging chaff into fire. From the fresh strip of hot ashes new smoke sprang out and was caught by wind and driven into his face as he stood there, waiting for an answer.

"You've come wrong way," she said. "This is the back end of it. It's up the hill."

"Which way would that be?"

"Up the hill," she said. Her voice was tart and confident. She dragged at hot ash and chaff again, stirring them to smoke. This time she darted a quick look at him to see if he had the sense to move away, but he still stood in the wind, letting the blue cloud drive full at his face.

"You'd better stand over here," she said, "if you don't want to get smoke-dried."

In that way she could see him better. She always looked first at men's hands, and she saw that his own were large and long-fingered but rather white. His hair was smooth and dark and brushed well back. That was the second thing she always looked for. She could not bear men with scruffy ill-kept hair that sowed seeds all over the shoulders of their jackets.

"Could I cut across the field?" he said.

"You could," she said, "if you want to land in the river. Which way did you come?"

"I walked from the station."

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"You should have got the bus and asked," she said. "Then they'd have put you down at Benacre."

"I thought I'd like the walk," he said.

She plunged the hay-fork into hot ash again, pulling half-burnt cakes of chaff out of the centre of the fire. One of them rolled like a slow fire-ball onto the singed, ash-dusted stubble as she said: "You'd better stand back if you don't want to get your shoes burnt."

That was the next thing she always looked for. Hands and hair and then shoes. Shoes were the things that had character. You could tell by the way a man laced his shoes or polished them or kept them repaired or even by what shape they were whether he was a careful man or a mean one or just slovenly or vain.

His own were rather like his hair; town shoes, smooth and black and well kept. They were already dusted by a fine powder of chaff-ash and she looked away in irritation. They were good, clean, well-tended shoes and she was annoyed by the dust on them as she might have been annoyed by the dust of his hair flaking down on his shoulders.

Looking away at the fire, she said: "You're looking for Jean Gadden, aren't you?"

"That's right. How—?"

"I'm her sister," she said. "I'm Doreen."

He seemed to look at her for the first time. Her face was flushed under the pale blue eyes with blotches of redness from the bluster of wind and the heat of fire. She had a plain white scarf tied tightly back over her head, giving her hair the impression of being whipped severely and sternly back. Her legs were shapeless in short turn-down gum-boots, like a fisherwoman's, and in denim trousers the colour of light brown cow-hide.

"I wouldn't have known it," he said.

The wind seemed to blow a shadow of fury across her face. No, you wouldn't know it, she thought. I'm that much older. Nearly forty. On the shelf, past it: that's what you were thinking. She stabbed at the fire again, moving from one heap to another, rolling fire-balls of chaff about the white-blue seething ashes and the running tongues of flame.

"I thought you were coming last Sunday?" she said.

"I was," he said. "Then I couldn't get my day off. I had to work the week-end."

"She waited all day. She didn't know what to do with herself."

"I had to work. There was no way of letting her know."

"You couldn't get away with that with some girls," she said. With me, for instance, she thought.

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He was standing too near the fire again and as she pushed past him, almost brushing him with the fork-handle, a turn of wind took all the smoke of the three fires upward in a single spiral column that turned in air and doubled back again, plunging down into the central core of ashes so that they grinned, red and teethlike, in the fanning wind.

"She knows I'm coming today, doesn't she?" he said.

"I expect so. She doesn't tell me everything."

She looked up at the sky. Clouds were curling up against each other, low and dirty, not unlike reflections in deeper uglier blue of the descending smoke of the fires.

"The wind's gone up the hill," she said. "It'll rain before you know where you are. You'd better get along to Benacre while it's dry."

"Are you going along?"

"I shall do. In a bit—"

"Then I'll wait for you," he said.

She swung round and said: "You needn't wait for me. Get on while you've got the chance. I'm used to it. You can cut across to the gate there—"

"I'd rather wait," he said. "I'm in no hurry."

"That's a compliment to somebody," she said.

Her eyes, as she turned, were held in a frown. Then it lifted. Smoke blew across her face in a long wriggling, just like the ghost of an escaping snake, and when it cleared again her eyes were fixed with a sort of thoughtful transparence on the central grinning portions of fire.

The glow seemed to consume some of her hardness and she said: "Weren't you going to stay the night? Where are your things?"

"I left my bag over by the gate," he said.

"You deserve to get it picked up by somebody then, that's all. There's people going by there all the time. You never know who's about."

"There's nothing in it to matter much," he said.

"Oh well," she said, "if that's how you look at it."

In a moment she was moving again from fire to fire, raking and stabbing, letting in wind that woke the chaff to grinning eyes and bright yellow flags of flame.

"Been threshing?" he said.

She wanted to say: "It looks like it, doesn't it?" Then she was unpredictably restrained by something, and she remembered her sister, at home in the kitchen, ironing a brown and yellow dress. She said: "Oh, weeks ago. We got done early. This was just the day for burning chaff, that's all."

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The dress was tight in the waist and had one of those wide black cummerbunds that women were wearing then. It was full about the hips and the ground-colour was a warm and lively brown, the colour of some autumn leaves, with sprigs of yellow tendril-borne flowers all over it, very delicate and small. It was the sort of dress she could never have chosen for herself. She always went wrong somewhere. The brown would have looked like furniture polish and the yellow crude and brassy, like dandelions.

She hadn't the taste of her sister. Things never came off for her. She hadn't the luck, either. She hadn't the way of not seeming to want men, the cool, aloof, irresponsible touch.

"There's a spit of rain," he said, and she laughed, very short and taunting, for the first time.

"You'll look well if she's not there when you get there."

"Oh, she'll be there—she said she would."

"Oh, will she?" she said. "Supposing she isn't? You take yourself for granted, don't you? You let her down on Sunday."

"I didn't let her down."

"Well, something like it. It didn't make her feel any sweeter."

"What would you do, then?" he said.

"I'd pitchfork anybody out, quick," she said, "if they let me down," and she made the gesture with her fork above the fire, scattering ash and smoke and chaff and a few flapping flames that seemed to turn dark orange above the ash in the darking afternoon.

He did not speak and she turned quickly to see if her taunting had touched him at all. His face was flushed. She felt amused in a confident sort of way about that. His hands were in his trouser-pockets, deep, so that she could not tell if they were clenched or open. Wind had disturbed his hair, raking up a few thin separate strands, exactly like the separations in a feather. His boots were almost white from dusty ash, and she was suddenly uneasy about the changes in the image of him since he had first walked across the field.

For a moment she lost all her hard, high, taunting composure, and she stabbed pointlessly at the fire again and said: "You mustn't mind me. You mustn't take any notice of me. Do you want to go? You do, don't you?"

Before he answered she heard the first spits of rain falling softly, piff, piff, into the heart of the fires.

"What about the fire?" he said. "I can wait for you."

"Oh, it'll burn itself out. It always does. Or the rain'll put it out." Her macintosh and her tea-bag lay behind her. As she turned to pick them up he moved to help her but she was there

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first, grabbing the coat before he could touch it. Then she slung the tea-bag over her back and sloped the fork over her shoulder.

" Come on, we'd better go," she said.

Rain in faster spits, sharply hissing as it struck down through the full sepia-orange of surrounding oaks, came out of the west as the two of them walked across the field. She found herself striding with head down, her big feet flat, her eyes looking at his shoes, ash-covered and now rain-pocked, their neatness gone.

" You think she'll be there all right? " he said.

" I expect so. If you're fool enough to come, I suppose she'll be fool enough to be there," she said.

She could not resist that. And supposing she was not there? She always was; she liked the boys, she had all the luck with them. She was pretty enough, with all the taste, for anybody. But supposing she were not, this time? Rain came swishing faster through the dry, golden-brown oaks and made an impression in her mind of thoughts rushing forward, herded and lost in disjointed confusion. What would she do if Jean were not there? Put on the green dress with the leather belt? And the flat shoes? And do her hair tightly up, in a coconut?

" Where's your case? " she said.

" Behind the hedge," he said. With head down against the rain, he brought back a small brown week-end case he had left in the shelter of the hedge, by the gate to the field.

" Here, you have this mac," she said.

" No," he said. " No, I'm all right."

" You've got your best suit on," she said. " You'll get it wet through. You'll ruin it. Come on, you have the mac on."

" No, you. It's yours. You have it."

" I don't want it," she said. " I'm used to it. Come on."

" I'm all right," he said.

" Are we going to quarrel over a mac? " she said. " You've ruined your shoes already."

Queer how the thought of the ruined shoes upset her. As he looked down at them she put the mac over his shoulders. They were standing in the road now and suddenly rain came beating down in white sheets on the black metal surface, at the same time tearing pale brown clouds of leaves that fell wetly across the slate-blue sky and its lighter drifts of low blue smoke from the fires.

When he spoke again his voice was sharp and annoyed.

" Now give me your tea-bag and hold the mac over your head," he said. " Go on. Hold one side while I hold the other. I don't know what we're arguing about. Put the mac over your head. There's enough for both of us."

She was quiet. She put the mac over her head and stared

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down at her big boots slapping in the wet, leaf-printed road, side by side with the neat half-spoilt shoes she liked so much. She did not know what to say and she wished suddenly that it was night-time, with nobody on the road, so that there was no way of seeing her face.

Presently she could bear it no longer and stopped and swung round to look back across the fields at the fires. The wind was blowing chaff and smoke and dust and flame into darkening rain from the three yellow heaps that were like solitary pyres.

"Keep the mac over your head," he said. "What are you looking at now?"

"Just the fires," she said.

"Oh! Come on, they'll burn out. You said they would."

"All right. I know."

"That's the trouble with some people," he said. "They always know. They always think they know."

She did not answer. She walked with head still farther down, watching the two pairs of feet. The rain beating on her lowered face made her feel dry and tired inside. What did she know? What were the sort of things she was supposed to know?

She was a fool and there was nothing, she thought, that she did know—nothing but the falling rain, the queer odour of the mac on her head, the fading smell of fire and smoke and falling leaf, and the chaff driving in the wind.

★ ★ ★

HUSH MONEY

In the early eighteen-thirties every kind of eccentricity flourished, and the delight of being absurd in public places, of trying to *épater le bourgeois* was very typical of the Dandies. At that time extravagant conduct began to be accepted as the hall-mark of independence, intelligence, and breeding. Well known are the peculiarities of behaviour of the Marquis de Saint Cricq . . . Roger de Beauvoir who knew him well said that he was not mad, or even eccentric, but that he had so great a contempt for the general public that he wanted to see how much it would swallow with open-mouthed astonishment, and the more he astounded it the more he despised it. De Beauvoir once heard him from his box at the Comédie Française shouting during a very bad play, "Thirty-thousand francs for the author!" and again repeatedly, "I demand thirty-thousand francs for the author!" When at last someone enquired why he wanted so large a reward for so bad a play, he answered: "He might then stop writing plays!"

ENID STARKIE, *Petrus Borel*

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SEA RESCUE

The dog could stand a watch as well as any man aboard

by EDMUND GILLIGAN

A MAN may think he chooses his own dog, and there's no harm in his thinking so. Just the same, it's often the other way round: the dog chooses the man. And a really clever dog—a collie, for instance—why, if the need arises, he'll go right on choosing. He'll choose a horse for his master, and find his master a pretty wife, too, for that matter, if one is wanted.

All this was certainly true in the case of young Philadelphia Keane, Captain of the Gloucester schooner *Mara*, who was named after one of the cities in the Bible. We never knew why the Grand Bankers decided to call him just the Philadelphia. Maybe it was because they liked him and his easy way of going about the business of catching cod. Yes, sad or merry, they all liked the Philadelphia. He was a merry man at sea, and he was at sea most of the time. When he was ashore, he seemed a little gloomy, and the reason for that was the difficulty he was having with Molly Darmody, who'd let him put his arm round her now and then, but not tight, and would sometimes let him kiss her cheek, but not the other kiss, the real one.

"I have my little boy to think of," she'd say.

"Ah, darling, I'll do the thinking for you," he'd say.

The Philadelphia and Jim Darmody had been dorymates when they were lads. One afternoon they were rolling along the main street, rich with cod dollars, and, at one and the same time, they saw Molly and they fell in love with her. It wasn't easy for her to choose one over the other. All the women of Folly Cove did their best to help her, and her choice fell on Jim. Some people said that the best of her advisers had her own cap set for the Philadelphia.

A season or two later, after the birth of the boy, Jim Darmody was lost when the *Susan B. Snow* foundered off Sable Island. It was the Philadelphia they chose to bring her the sad news, for he had a kind heart and a way of soothing hearts that needed it. Ten long and lonely years had passed for them and yet he couldn't bring her to say yes or even no—not that he would have listened to the latter one.

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Well, the Philadelphia came down to the wharf one Sunday morning just to see how the *Mara* had passed the night. He had walked home from church with Molly and her son Peter, and he was still dressed in his Sunday best, which was just a little smarter than anybody else's best. He always carried himself well, and he was a pleasant sight in the blue suit, the blue shirt he always favoured, his red moustache that was bigger than his bow tie, and his smile that was brighter than anything else about him.

As the Philadelphia stepped lightly from the wharf to the *Mara*'s rail, a collie pup came rushing from under the port dories. The pup was about the size of a steaker cod. He barked and snarled in the most manly way. All this wrath was directed against the Philadelphia, who had as much right as anybody to come aboard.

He explained this to the pup. First, out of respect for his beautiful trousers, he kept his position at the rail. There he spoke to the pup, saying he wasn't to be excited, that he, the Philadelphia, was not only skipper of the *Mara*, but was also owner of a half of her.

" The better half," said the Philadelphia, who was always ready to make a joke, if only a poor one.

Nevertheless, the pup showed his little teeth and kept on yapping in protest at anybody coming aboard that vessel.

" And one thing more," said the Philadelphia, " something I always tell bad dogs in advance: you bite me and I'll bite you, sure as shooting. Look at these, will you? "

And he showed his teeth to the pup. " Go ahead now and bite, but don't say I didn't warn you."

He pretended to take a step down and he smiled in that winning way of his. This did no good at all. The pup was willing to exchange bites, right then and there, in defence of the *Mara*. He made that plain.

Always a man to take it easy, the Philadelphia went over to the Anchor House and had his dinner, which was the same as his dinner at sea: a plate or two of soup, a dozen muffins or so, and a T-bone steak with a few eggs fried in butter just to fill up any corners that might need filling up.

" Just wrap up the bone for me, John," he said to the waiter. " I've got a dog aboard the *Mara* who likes a bone for Sunday if there's a good bit of meat left on it."

So he went back to the schooner and gave the bone to the pup, who accepted it and the Philadelphia at the same time. After that, the Philadelphia gave the pup a drink from the galley.

" Well, you're my dog," said the Philadelphia. " I always wanted one, but I didn't know it till now. And now I have you."

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It was a mistake for the Philadelphia to think he had chosen the dog. But it was a good mistake and turned out well because the pup went to sea on Monday and soon learnt a lot about killing cod. By the time the collie got his growth, he was a top-notch doryman. So that's what they named him: Doryman.

He could ride a doryload of fish back to the *Mara*, and Johnny Maio, the Portuguese, had even taught the dog to hold the sheet in his teeth for sailing up to the schooner when the wind was fair. The dog could stand a watch as well as any man aboard—better, for he could see through fog and smell through it. Everybody knows how he snuffed out the stink of a destroyer that time she bore down on the *Mara* in a fog and would have destroyed her, if Doryman hadn't roared like a fog-horn.

Another season passed and then the Philadelphia made another good mistake. He was strolling home with Molly from a dance and he was wheedling her again, holding her hand and getting ready to slip an arm around her, when she came out with the story that her boy was again wishing to go to sea and had no mind for the long-shore life she wanted him to follow. Well, she had struck on a clever way to knock the notion out of him. She meant he should go to sea while he was still a schoolboy and maybe have it knocked out of him in a manner not too injurious.

"You're making a mistake, Molly," said the Philadelphia, "and I don't think it will work, but send the boy down to the vessel before the tide serves tomorrow and I'll do what I can, but I won't answer for it."

"I'll answer for it myself, Captain," said she. "But bring him back to me, Phil, or don't dare to come back yourself. And if it's the sea he wants after he has lived upon it, then he may have it in good time, and I'll never say no to you again."

And that is how Peter Darmody, at the age of twelve, came to be standing watch one morning on Sable Island Bank with Doryman, the collie. The *Mara* had gone to that bank in rather a daring mood, it being a risky place for a vessel. However, the Sable Island haddock are sweet and fat and the price of haddock at Boston Fish Pier was enough to drive a lesser man to the risk. To the Philadelphia it was no risk, he being a master of the gales and never surprised by one. He had no more fear of that dreadful island than he had of icebergs in the spring.

The *Mara* was on fish, and lying between the two lights of Sable, when the day came up, all green and gold, and showed the island to Peter Darmody. You could tell he was a chip off the old Cape Ann block because no tale of her grasping shoals could make him take his eyes off her beauty; for she is beautiful, that

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island, with her green-topped dunes and the wrecks scattered along her curving shores. He had listened to the old dorymen spinning their yarns of Sable and the way she sucked vessels into her sands. He'd heard tales of treasures found there—gold pieces and diamonds and cutlasses dropped by dying adventurers four hundred years ago and more.

"What I would like to do when I'm a grown man," said Peter, "is to set foot on that island."

"The Lord forbid!" said the Philadelphia.

Up from a hollow, between two dunes, there came a band of the wild horses of Sable Island. Puzzling horses these are, for no man knows whence they came. Some say the Portuguese adventurers put the horses on Sable an age ago, when it was a hundred miles long and ten times wider than it is today. It was good pasture land and there was none on the distant mainland of Nova Scotia. So they put the horses ashore in order to have something to eat if ever they were wrecked on that island, or ran short of food when they were sailing near it.

Many years later, the tale goes, the Boston men did the same thing when they were working the walrus fishery of Sable. And there are other yarns of horse transports wrecked on those shores, especially one called *L'Africaine*, sent by the French on some business or other. Whoever did it, there the horses are and there they flourish, if forage is good. When it isn't good, they wane and the wild mares have no milk and won't own their foals.

It was this glimpse of the wild band that made young Peter reveal something more of himself. "Ah," he said, "there's nothing I'd like better than a colt of my own." He sighed in a boyish way and went on: "I love horses, Captain, almost as much as I love a dory."

Thinking this was as good a time as any, the Philadelphia said brightly, "Wouldn't you like to be in the horse business, Peter, my boy?"

"Thank you, sir," replied Peter. "The horse business would be very nice, but it's not for seamen, is it?" At that, he gave a sweep of his eye to the eastward and hunched his shoulders a little.

He was turning on his heel, and Doryman after him, when the Philadelphia asked, "And where are you going, my boy?"

"To take a look at the glass," said the greenhorn gravely. "I don't doubt it's falling again. I can feel it in my bones."

The Philadelphia kept the smile off his face until Peter had gone below. He had nothing more to say about Peter's future. He knew for sure that he had made a mistake in taking this boy to sea. The *Mara* was only a week out. Yet that was enough. The last remark about the barometer proved it. The *Mara* had

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taken a fierce drubbing on her way to Nova Scotia for bait, but Peter had gone about his business unconcerned, lending a hand here and another there. When the *Mara* reached the bank and the word passed "Bait up! Bait up!" the Philadelphia, meaning to discourage him, had handed him a knife and had shown him the one stroke down and the two across the herring. Before the *Mara* had sailed another mile, Peter was cutting away like a good one. He baited a tub of trawl hooks all by himself. He hadn't missed a trick in all the complicated business of getting the dories over and setting the trawls. In fact, he carried himself so well that the Philadelphia began to watch him with a calculating eye.

"Has the glass dropped, Peter?"

"Why, yes, it has, Captain. Down two points since noon, but nothing to worry about." He thought this over and, for caution's sake, added, "Not yet, anyway."

The Philadelphia resolved that such a born captain should never waste a season on dry land. He revealed this by a remark that made Peter flush with pride: "Always give this island a good berth, Peter. Keep away from her."

There was a step more: the dory. Peter could handle a dory as well as any smart lad could—that is, a dory without fish in it. Once or twice, while the men were making the set and the baited hooks were drifting down to the fish, the Philadelphia had dropped a dory over and Peter and Doryman had fooled around a little, Peter at the oars or at the sail, whichever was best. It wasn't until there were eighty thousand pounds of fish in the *Mara*'s pens that the Philadelphia nodded his head and said Johnny Maio could take Peter as dorymate to haul the last set before the run home to a Wednesday market.

This was a mistake. Not that Johnny Maio wasn't a good doryman. He was as good as any, but there was something in his character that the Philadelphia hadn't seen, and it was his business to see it. This was it: in the presence of an admiring greenhorn, Johnny was certain to show off. He was proud of his skill. He had been cautioned against overloading his dory, especially on Sable Island Bank, where things happen to the weather quickly.

The Philadelphia gave the nod. He sang out, "Dory away!" and down went Number One with Peter in it, watching Johnny Maio shrewdly. Johnny took in the first buoy and its anchor and began to haul the fish. He laughed as he slatted the haddock off the hooks, and he laughed with pleasure in his new dorymate when Peter coiled the empty trawl back into the tub.

If Johnny Maio had hauled one haddock in his long life, he

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had hauled a million, more or less, and there was no reason why he should get excited. Yet perhaps there was, because the Sable haddock are such corkers that a man can feel the dollars dropping into his pocket. So up the fish came, and deeper the dory rode. At last, out of his natural wisdom, Peter said, " If this keeps up, we'll have enough and more than enough."

All the answer he got was another laugh and the toss of another fish and another until they came up to the windward buoy, which was a finish to the day's work and to the voyage, too. There being only a score of hooks down, Johnny Maio called Peter forward to the turning gurdy and said, " Now you haul, lad, and take the buoy in."

This was man's estate. Peter put his young back into the haul and up he drew a fine fish, then an empty hook or two, and another fish. He shook the fish off and when he reached the buoy he took it in handily and hauled up its anchor.

All of a sudden, he raised his eyes to the sky and said the sentence that lies eternal in all Gloucestermen's hearts: " I don't like this! " The evening sky had gone dark.

All the other dories had taken the warning as quickly. The conch horns bawled and cried. The *Mara* answered, her horn assuring them she was on the way.

Fast and white as a gull, the first squall sped across the sea. The sky went from grey to black, and the fog washed over the black like a flurry of March snow. Before Johnny Maio could lift his horn to his lips, the dory was alone in a white wilderness. The horn of the *Mara* blew faint and far.

" Don't be afraid, boy. Johnny knows how."

Peter replied, " I'm not afraid. What's there to be afraid of? "

For an answer, a big sea hit the dory broadside on with a whack that shook Johnny Maio where he stood too deep in fish. He staggered. A second sea struck even harder and sent him roaring over the side. This happens to overloaded dories. That it should happen to Peter on his first haul was just in the way of schooling. Peter didn't cry out. He just waited until Johnny came battling up out of the tide, and down into the splashing arms he flung the buoy. Johnny Maio grasped it and let out a shout of triumph. Away on the clockwise current the buoy and the man rode and vanished.

The only music that Peter could play was the conch music, which is the music of salvation. He took up Johnny's horn and blew the three sharp notes that Johnny had taught him were the shrillest and the best.

One by one, the bawling and pleading horns ceased as the

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dories were picked up. A harsh fall of rain stopped all such noises for a while. The wind began to pipe up in real earnest. The darkness thickened. The wind veered to the west and then began to blow all over the compass.

" I'm in for it."

With no more than that in the way of comfort, Peter Darmody became a doryman. It was a quick promotion, no doubt, but he had no choice in the matter.

Well, he was his father's son, as the saying goes. So he did what his father had done more than once: he cleared for action, which is to say that in five minutes there wasn't a fish on the dory's bottom boards. No, nor a bailerful of water. He sat to the oars. In the dusk and the howling, he sat to them, and to the tide and gale he gave the answer that Gloucestermen will always give: the sharp, deep stroke.

Past the dory the *Mara* shot like a wild goose, and down the tide the Philadelphia drove her under a whole mainsail, knowing well enough what had happened because he could tell Peter's greenhorn notes from the old ones on that horn. Torches blazed on the *Mara's* deck. Her horn bleated and the sweet tones of the main-boom bell rang like a church bell on a summer's day. Louder still came the bark of Doryman, running between helm and rail and trying to snuff up the smell of Johnny Maio, which he had done to good purpose more than once.

A mile away from the dory, there came out of the sea a powerful shout. Before Johnny Maio could spew out another mouthful of salt and shout again, the *Mara* swept up to him and a hook came down for his buoy. He came in over the rail, staggered to his feet, and looked the Philadelphia square in the eye. But not for long. Johnny's guilt made him look away.

" In the dory, is he? " asked the Philadelphia, and in the asking his handsome face went white, not only for the lost boy, but for the wife he had lost after such long striving, such long loneliness.

" Aye! " cried Johnny, and then, to save his own anguish, he pleaded: " Take him up first, Captain."

The Philadelphia took a measure of the tide, another of the wind, and brought the wheel up hard. She came round and sped up the line, two dories yet to be found, and a hard job, too, in all that whirligig. She came round handsomely and flew westward close to the wind, belling and howling, with her torches flaring. Stretched in her shrouds and leaning over her rail, the men peered into the fog.

She ran on half a mile to the westward, and then, clear and loud to leeward, the horn of Number Two dory bawled. In that

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dory were two grown men, family men and great killers of fish, whose value is always greatest, according to the law of the Grand Banks. They were at hand and the Philadelphia was making a try for them when the collie came away from the windward rail, yelping for joy. He trotted to the helm and made his appeal to the Philadelphia, saying as clear as could be: I've snuffed Peter out—this way!—to windward!

"Keep the dog off!" cried the Philadelphia, harsh and strained against the spokes. Never in his life had he spoken harshly to man or dog, but now he spoke so and in terrible anger. The reason was that he faced a bitter choice. He had to choose between another try—perhaps a hopeless one—for Peter's dory, out of sight and out of sound, and the certain rescue of the second dory, which he could hear plainly enough.

And there was another choice he had to make: the choice between the loss of two able dorymen and the loss of Molly Darmody and the kiss he had waited years to take. The law of the Banks was against the Philadelphia and his love, for it declares that the able-bodied must be saved first, not only for their skilled hands, but for their women and children at home. The Philadelphia obeyed the law. He struck the pleading dog away.

Johnny Maio reached out for Doryman and said a word to soothe him. The dog showed his teeth in a growl and ran again to the rail. He thrust his muzzle into the noisy gloom and barked loud and long.

The horn in Number Two dory shouted: Where are you?—This way!—This way!

The *Mara*'s horn replied as she swept towards the dory.

At the wail of the *Mara*'s horn, Doryman set up a howling that was like a wail, too, for it was clear to him that the vessel was drawing away from Number One dory and the boy. So, without a backward look, he threw himself over the rail and went like a tramp seal to Peter and Number One, held in its place by the sharp, deep stroke. On the lift of a sea, Doryman came to her gunwale and scrambled for a hold.

"In with you!" said Peter Darmody. He took in his oars and gave Doryman the haul he needed and a quick hug, and then he blew again on his horn. A cross sea, whipped high by the gale, struck the dory and drowned the horn's notes. The sea threw so much water into the dory that he had to drop the horn and bail. Foam and darkness covered him, and that was the reason the *Mara* ran past him without a chance of seeing the dory.

The Philadelphia drove the *Mara* onward a mile. Then he realized he had run past the dory. He threw the *Mara* over onto the other tack and came back up, every man straining to hear

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Peter's horn. But by that time Peter had had to make a choice, too. He could either stay silent and bail, or blow his horn and drown. He bailed.

Farther away now, the *Mara* in despair began the traditional search for a lost dory; a circle, round and round, waiting for daylight and the long sweep of glasses from her tall cross-trees.

Peter bailed the dory and rowed. He bailed again and once more sat to the oars. All night long he stayed on the thwart until his head sagged and his hands pained him. The four-knot current that runs eastward there had long since whirled him away from the *Mara* and all rescue. At daybreak, he was alone on a grey sea. Far to the rim of the world, the white-caps rose and broke and rose again.

He stood up and took his last look for the schooner.

"We're in for it, Doryman." This was the same remark as before, except for the "we." Then he said, "Eat and drink first."

He took up the water jug and shook it. It was less than half full. He swallowed a mouthful and poured the dog's ration into a dipper. Doryman drank hastily. Peter took the food tin and opened it. There were two round crackers in it. He broke one in half and they ate.

Peter studied the compass. The nearest land was what he was looking for, and that land was Sable Island. How far it was he couldn't tell, but he knew where it lay.

"Due west," he said. On that course he laid the dory, her sail set under the cold rain falling. All day long he held her to it. Twice the gale came back to take a spit at him. At noon, they drank but didn't eat. At nightfall, they ate for the last time and drank for the next to last. And soon, because he had never missed a night's sleep in his life, the need of sleep began to hurt worse than his hunger, though he had never known that, either. He lashed the sheet and shut his eyes for a little. He woke and drove her on again.

The dark passed into the west, and the day—which was dark, too—rolled over the sea. The tide set against the dory. The wind stayed fair, but little was gained by it until slack water. The tide turned and the dory sped faster into the west. Yet the end of the struggle had come for Peter. He had no more to give. He had no strength for the bailer and none for lashing the sheet again. He laughed at himself a little before he closed his eyes. Remembering the playtime trick taught to Doryman by Johnny Maio, he thrust the sheet into the dog's mouth. He laughed again and whispered, "You sail her, Doryman. I can't."

Peter slept. In a little while, his sleep became more than

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sleep. It was deeper. He lay senseless, so that when the West Light of Sable flashed and the East Light shone, he knew nothing of it. Nor did Doryman. He clung to the rope, remembering his orders, until, just before daybreak, the wind carried the dory over the bar that forms the lagoon on the eastern shore. The surf caught the dory and drove her on the beach. There it filled and rolled on its side.

The work was now something Doryman could do. He backed out of the dory, sank his teeth into Peter's oilskin trousers, and hauled. A sea came up and ran over them. He braced himself in the shifting sand and hauled hard. He dragged Peter beyond the high-water weeds, licked his face, and barked. The froth ran up and touched Peter's cheek. Doryman took a new grip and dragged him, inch by inch, onto the dry sand. A great log lay there. He dragged him to shelter behind it and lay by his side.

Doryman began to bark. Soon his grief turned the barking into a long howl of anguish.

There was a reddish stallion watching on the dune above them. At the sound of Doryman's howls he began to shake with terror and anger. He had never seen or heard a dog. He reared, fought the shadows with his hoofs, and bared his teeth. He trotted down the far side and drove his mares and children out of the hollow. He nipped a lagging mare and then he whistled up the other stallions.

They answered him. Blacks and bays, chestnuts and greys, they answered and joined up for the rush of hoofs that would crush the intruder. Their approach, shoulder to shoulder in the half-light of dawn, seemed a pleasant thing to Doryman. He trotted out to meet them, for he could be sure that one of these would be bearing a man, which was what he wanted just then. He wanted the Philadelphia; lacking that man, any other would do. It didn't take him long to make out that these weren't the saddle mares and farm horses of Cape Ann. He didn't hesitate. He took his stand in front of Peter and then he sprang, choosing the reddish stallion for the first rip along the throat.

The stallion reared and screamed. He struck with his forefeet and missed. Doryman whirled and roared and slashed again. In terror the band split in two. One band ran into the surf, the other over the dune. Only one stallion, a young black, whirled to show his courage and try again. His hoof caught Doryman on the shoulder. The dog fell, turned over and over in a flash, and came up again in silent fury. He drove under the uplifted hoofs and slashed at the stallion's belly. The stallion ran.

Quiet returned to the morning. Doryman ran back to Peter's side; and then, quartering about skilfully, he sought among the

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many horse-tracks the scent of a familiar print: the one made by burnt hoofs wearing iron. It was there, left by the mounted patrols of Sable Island. But it was too faint for his nose. He ranged farther inland, like a setter making game. He trotted into a hollow that was still gloomy with the night. Something stopped him there: a pair of eyes glowing in a nest of marsh hay under wild cranberry bushes. Doryman spoke kindly to the eyes. They closed, in terror or in weariness.

Doryman ran on. He swung towards the light and there he found a fresher scent of burnt hoof and horseshoe metal. He ran after it in silence and came up to it warily. Before him, bolt upright in the saddle, a man rode towards the lighthouse. Doryman stole after him, careful not to frighten the horse. When the rider dismounted and tied up his horse at a rail between the lighthouse and a cottage, Doryman walked up slowly and lay down at the rider's feet.

"Great day in the morning! Where d'you come from?" The man held out a hand and laughed. Doryman wagged his tail and licked the hand.

The Governor of Sable Island, as the Gloucestermen call him, knew very well where Doryman had come from and why. He had seen ships wrecked and sailors strewn along those shores. So he turned and ran into the cottage, with Doryman after him, and he cranked the telephone and shouted into it, "Vessel ashore! Get the patrols out from both lights, boy!"

He patted Doryman on the head, ran out of the door, heaved himself into the saddle, and gave the signal to Doryman, who streaked off the way he had come. In five minutes, the Governor was kneeling by Peter's side. In another five, Peter was in the house, blinking over a cup of tea and whispering to the Governor about the *Mara*.

"Now you take it easy," said the Governor. "I know her and I know Philadelphia Keane. They're all right, and glad he'll be to get the news I'll send him now."

He sent a message to both lighthouses and soon the great blinkers were signalling the word over the sea to the *Mara*, wherever she might be searching.

The Governor gave Peter a hot bath and another cup of tea and a bit of toast, and then a bowl of broth. He built a fire in the big hearth and carried a couch to it. There Peter fell asleep again. This time it was a good, natural sleep, and his cheeks were red, not white.

It was then that the Governor and the Coast Guardsmen turned to Doryman, and high time too, because he was weak from

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hunger and thirst. The Governor made up a dish of stewed meat and put it down for Doryman with a word of praise to season it. Doryman ate part of it, and then began to whine at the door, looking back at the men who sat watching him.

The Governor looked at Peter, who was fast asleep, and said, "What's this? The boy said they were alone in the dory!"

Doryman scratched at the door.

"If he goes, I'll go." And at that the Governor opened the door and hurried out after Doryman, who led him straight to the nest where he had seen the pair of beseeching eyes.

"So that's what you want, is it?" The Governor thrust aside the cranberry boughs over the nest and there, on its spindly legs, a pretty red foal tottered, hardly able to keep his big head up. It was easy to tell what his fate had been: his dam had left him there because she had no milk for him.

"You being a hero," said the Governor to Doryman, "you may have anything your heart desires. If his ma won't own him, I will. I've done it before and now I do it for you." So saying, he heaved the foal right to his shoulder and carried him to the fire-place and fed him warm milk out of a bottle. The milk had cod-liver oil in it, which he had used often in such cases.

It was after nightfall before the *Mara*, desperate in her search, came up to read the blinkers. Her decks blazed with torches and lanterns. When the message was reeled off to her again, the lights went out one by one until nothing showed of her except her green lamp rising and falling in peace. The Philadelphia signalled he would sail round to the western beach, where there was a little shelter. The *Mara* made off. But the gale came up again and kept her on the run. She had to heave to and ride it out. It was almost a week before the Philadelphia stepped ashore and took the Governor's hand and thanked him from a heart that was too full for his usual words.

"You may thank your dog, Captain," the Governor said, and he led him to the fire-place, where the three young redheads were snug by the fire and talking away at a great rate about certain plans natural for a boy and a dog and a foal to make.

The Philadelphia said to Peter, "Well done, my boy!" and he put his arms round him. Into the Philadelphia's eyes came the new hope that now this boy would become his son. And the Philadelphia shook Doryman's paw solemnly and said, "Well done, my dog!"

They all went out into the sunny day, Peter hand in hand with the Philadelphia, and Doryman and the foal together like old friends. They came up to the dory, and the dorymen stepped out, ready to push off. Peter said good-bye to the Governor.

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Without batting an eye, he put his arms round the foal's neck and said good-bye to him.

" Shove off! " said the Philadelphia, when Peter had taken his seat.

Peter turned his back to Sable Island and to the foal, and bent his head a little.

" Come now, Doryman, get aboard! " shouted the Philadelphia.

Nothing of the kind. Doryman stretched himself on the sand, just as if he meant to enjoy the sun. The foal took a step towards the dory and then walked over and lay down by Doryman.

" Will you come along, good dog? " cried the Philadelphia. " We've missed the Wednesday market as it is. Come now! " Doryman yawned and sat where he was, close to the foal.

The Governor looked at his men and the men winked at him. Then the Governor said quite loudly to nobody in particular, " Evaporated milk, hot water, a touch of cod-liver oil. Yes, sir, that's what I always use in such cases."

It can't be denied: here, for the first time among the *Mara* men, there was mutiny.

" Well," said the Philadelphia. " Well—"

All hands were listening intently, except Doryman, who was pretty confident and just kept looking about in an airy manner.

" Well," said the Philadelphia, as if he were choosing every syllable with care, " I always did want a horse, and that's a fact, though I didn't know it till now." Then he gave a terrible shout: " Get aboard—all of you! "

At once, Doryman jumped into the dory, and after him came the foal, ably assisted by the Governor, who was bursting with laughter.

" Shove off! " cried the Philadelphia, as Doryman took his place next to Peter, who put his arm round him.

And there's the proof, if any is needed, that a smart dog will not only choose his own master, but he will choose a horse for him, too, in case master can't make up his mind.

There's no need of saying that when these four came gaily down the lane of Folly Cove, a few days later, Molly Darmody couldn't refuse the kiss, the kiss at last, to the Philadelphia.

She welcomed them all home—Peter and Doryman and the Philadelphia—and made room in the barn behind the house for the new member of the family, the red foal from Sable Island.

★ ★ ★

WHOLE STORY

A bachelor life is just one undarned thing after another.

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VENICE OBSERV'D

The pleasant place of all festivity
The revel of the earth, the masque of Italy

LORD BYRON, *Childe Harold*

This noble city doth in a manner chalenge this at my hands, that I should describe her also as well as the other cities I saw in my journey, partly because she gaue me most louing kinde entertainment for the sweetest time (I must needes confesse) that euer I spent in my life: and partly for that she ministered unto me more variety of remarkable delicious objects then mine eyes euer suruayed in any city before, or euer shall . . . the fairest Lady, yet the richest Paragon, and Queene of Christendome.

THOMAS CORYATE, *Crudities*, 1611

Dream City

A City, and a City in the tide,
All life where these white marbles glint and gleam
Is twofold, the reality and dream,
A vision on the waters waste and wide.
Along whose silent streets like phantoms glide
The dark gondolas on a sluggish stream,
And the mysterious past of power supreme
Whispers from shimmering depths where shadows hide . . .

BENJAMIN GEORGE AMBLER, *Venice*

Gondola

"Lavinia! Lavinia!" Right and left her mother's summons enfiladed the terrace. "Am I to wait here all night?"

"Coming!" cried Miss Johnstone in a thin pipe, making her way through the occasional tables to where, nodding and tossing her bold, blonde head, her mother stood while the servants scurried round her.

"Where is my gondola?" the lady demanded, her eye sweeping the Grand Canal with such authority that her daughter thought that the craft must rise, like Venus from the waves. "I ordered it for eleven. I come down at half-past eleven, and there is no sign of it."

"Emilio, Emilio," called a concierge, shrinking so much that

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his scarlet waistcoat hung quite loosely on him. "He is here, Madam."

"Why doesn't he come then, if he's here?" Mrs. Johnstone asked, adding in a gentler tone, "I see he's untying himself. What unhandy things these gondolas are. No wonder they are to be abolished."

Propelled from post to post by Emilio's outstretched hand the deprecated vessel drew up to the steps. With a gesture that just escaped being a flourish, the gondolier took off his hat and held it across his body; his hair blew backwards, caught by the wind. As though in a dream Miss Johnstone saw her mother, poised on the unsteady embarkation board, give him the benefit of that glare before which all Boston quailed; and then, a weakness surely without precedent, she saw her mother's eyelids flicker.

"*Comandi, Signora?*" said the gondolier, whilst Miss Johnstone fitted herself into the space her mother left over.

"What does the man say?" asked Mrs. Johnstone, petulant at being addressed in a foreign tongue.

"He wants to know where to take us," Lavinia replied.

"Do you mean he doesn't know?" asked her mother, amazed that any wish of hers, however private, should be stillborn.

L. P. HARTLEY, *Simonetta Perkins*

Barcarolle

Each blue sun-floodlit day floats through a green evening till Night
Releases flows of indigo to stain sea, sky, and shore;
And deep into dark velvet folds are absorbed from the air
The orchestral murmurs of the crowd and bursts of bright
Abruptly ebbing brassy music bruited from the Square.

On the Lagoon drift shreds of serenade from the lanterned boats
That bob more quickly like a pulse when from the Lido steers
Close past them the returning vaporetto; the heart beats
More quickly for a moment, lifted on a wave of tears
Upwelling but not breaking in the eyes of one who floats

Reclining in a gondola alone and with the tide
Being borne across the Bacino towards where all the stars
In heaven like spilt pearls blur on the black robe Venice wears
Slackly undulating round her when as a nocturnal bride
She mourns her morning glory long drowned in the sea of years.

DAVID GASCOYNE,
A Vagrant and Other Poems

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The Façade of St. Mark's

The curling tops of breakers loop
Your arches in marmoreal spray;
From what celestial circus-troupe
Did your four guardian horses stray?
And whose seraphic, stage-struck mind
Astonishment in stone designed?

Our high, cold vaults, our shafts and towers
Speak reverence and awe; but you
Remind us that Christ looked at flowers,
And, dusted o'er with gold and blue,
You prove in every laughing line
That gaiety can be divine.

L. E. Jones,
Stings and Honey

Souvenir

The winter sun imparted an indescribable air of sparkle and gaiety to the bands of people strolling up and down the Riva or through the gardens towards the new city, bright painted as the background of a newly restored Florentine primitive. And near by stands the Arsenal: that great expanse of red wall, with, squatting in front of it, the four most romantic stone lions in the world.

These animals, which have seldom attracted so much attention as their history warrants, were brought here from the Piraeus in the seventeenth century, and are Byzantine in origin: while on the back of the largest of them, if you examine it closely, is very distinctly to be seen a runic inscription, cut some time in the eleventh century, by Norse pirates.

They figure, of course, in the work of Guardi: but then what features of Venice did he omit to record? In his gondola-studio, he laboured without end, to turn out mementoes for travellers. So was his art regarded, equivalent to the snapshots of today, taken outside St. Mark's under a cloud of bumping pigeons. And I have seen two lovely little drawings, on the back of which was written in the artist's hand, the intimation that similar views could be obtained from F. Guardi at the cost of a sequin.

Osbert Sitwell,
Winters of Content

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★ *John Steinbeck returns to the scene of his earlier triumph, "Cannery Row"—back to the wharfside where he described, with lyrical tenderness and robust humour, the salty tang of life along this Californian waterfront. Argosy has pleasure in presenting chapters from his forthcoming novel "Sweet Thursday"—a new masterpiece by the author of "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Of Mice and Men."*

SWEET THURSDAY

By JOHN STEINBECK

MONTEREY'S Joe Blaikey was a good constable. He wouldn't ever be chief—didn't much want to be. Everybody in town liked Joe and trusted him. He was the only man in town who could stop a husband-and-wife fight. He came by his techniques both in social life and in violence from being the youngest of fifteen nice but violent children. Just getting along at home had been his teacher. Joe knew everyone in Monterey and he could size up a stranger almost instantly.

When a girl named Suzy got off the long-distance bus, she looked up and down the street, fixed her lipstick, then lifted her beaten-up suitcase and headed for the Golden Poppy Restaurant. Suzy was a pretty girl with a flat nose and a wide mouth. She had a good figure, was twenty-one, five feet five, hair probably brown (dyed blonde), brown cloth coat, rabbitskin collar, cotton print dress, brown calf shoes, heeltaps a little run over, scuff on the right toe. She limped slightly on her right foot. Before she picked up her suitcase she opened her brown purse of imitation leather. In it were a mirror, a comb with two teeth missing, cigarettes, a matchbook that said *Hotel Rosaline, San Francisco*, half a packet of peppermint life-savers, eighty-five cents in silver, no paper money, a lipstick but no powder, a tin box of aspirin, no keys.

If there had been a murder that night Joe Blaikey could have written all that down, but now he wasn't even aware that he knew it. Joe acted pretty much by instinct. He got into the Golden Poppy just as the waitress was putting a cup of coffee on the counter in front of Suzy. Joe slipped onto the stool next to her. "Hi, Ella," he said to the waitress. "Cup of coffee."

"Coming up," said Ella. "How's your wife, Joe?"

"Oh, pretty good. Wish she'd get her strength back, though."

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" Takes it out of you," said Ella. " A man can't understand that. Give her a tonic and let her rest. I'll have fresh coffee in a minute if you want to wait."

" Yeah," said Joe.

Ella went to the head of the counter, put coffee in the percolator, and filled the bowl.

Joe said quietly to Suzy, " What's on your mind, sister? "

" Not a thing," said Suzy. She didn't look at him but she could see him in the shine of a malted milk machine behind the counter.

" Vacation? "

" Sure."

" How long? "

" Don't know."

" Looking for a job? "

" Maybe."

Ella started towards them, saw what was happening, and got busy at the other end of the counter.

Joe asked, " Know anybody here? "

" I've got an aunt here."

" What's her name? "

" That your business? "

" Yep."

" All right. I've got no aunt."

Joe smiled at her, and Suzy felt better. She liked a guy who worried about his wife. He said to her, " Down and out? "

" Not yet," said Suzy. " You going to make trouble for me, mister? "

" Not if I can help it," said Joe. " Got a Social Security card? "

" Lost it," said Suzy.

Joe said, " It's a tough town. All organized. Don't work the street. Chief won't have it. If you need a buck to get out of town, come to me. My name's Joe Blaikey."

" Thanks, Joe. But I ain't hustling, honest."

" Not yet, you ain't," said Joe. " It's a hell of a town to get a job in since the canneries closed. Take it easy."

He stood up and stretched. " I'll get the coffee later, Ella," he said and went out.

Ella's work seemed to be all done. She mopped the counter with a damp cloth. " Swell fella," she said. " More coffee? The fresh lot's ready."

" Seemed like it," said Suzy. " Yeah."

Ella brought a fresh cup. " Where're you staying? "

" Don't know yet."

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"My sister lets rooms—pretty nice. Four dollars a week. I can give her a ring, see if she's got one vacant."

"I think I'll look around town a little," said Suzy. "Say, mind if I leave my suitcase here? It's kind of heavy."

"Sure. I'll put it back of the counter here."

"Well, s'pose you're off shift when I come back?"

Ella looked levelly at Suzy. "Sister," she said, "I ain't never off shift."

Suzy looked in the shop windows on Alvarado Street, and then she went to the wharf and watched the fishing-boats at their moorings. A school of tiny fish always lay in the shade of the pier and two little boys fished with hand-lines and never caught anything. About four o'clock she strolled along deserted Cannery Row, bought a packet of cigarettes at Lee Chong's, glanced casually at the Western Biological Laboratory, and knocked on the door of the Bear Flag.

The owner was named Flora, but once in the Mission where she was working at the time, a gentleman bum finished his soup and said, "Flora, you seem more a fauna-type to me."

"Say, I like that," she had said. "Mind if I keep it?" And she did. She was Fauna ever after.

She received Suzy in the combination bedroom and office. "I'll tell you the truth," said Fauna, "business ain't been good. It may pick up in June. I wish I could put you on. Ain't you got a hard-luck story that would kind of sway me?"

"Nope," said Suzy.

"You broke?"

"Yep."

"But you don't make nothing of it." Fauna leaned back in her swivel chair and squinted her eyes. "I used to work in a Mission," she said. "I know hard-luck stories from both ends. I guess if you laid all the hard luck I've heard end to end, why, the Bible would look short. And some of them stories was true. Now, I could make a guess about you."

Suzy sat silent—posture, hands, face non-committal.

"Unhappy home," said Fauna. "Fighting all the time. Probably you wasn't more than fifteen or sixteen when you married the guy, or maybe he wouldn't marry you. You did it just to get away from the fighting."

Suzy made no reply. Fauna looked away so that she wouldn't see the hands slowly grip each other.

"Got in the family way right off," said Fauna. "That made the guy restless, and he ran out on you. What did you say?"

"I didn't say nothing," said Suzy.

"Where's the baby?"

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"I lost it."

"Do you hate the guy?"

"I've got nothing to say," said Suzy.

"O.K. with me. I ain't really very interested. There's some girls born for this business. Some are too lazy to work and some hate men. Hardly any of them enjoy what they're doing—That would be like a bar-tender that loves to drink. You don't look born to it. You ain't lazy. Why don't you get a job?"

"I worked as a waitress and I worked in a five-and-dime store. The only difference is you get taken to a cinema instead of three dollars," said Suzy.

"Got a boy?"

"Nope."

"Hate boys?"

"Nope."

Fauna sighed. "You've got me, sister. I can feel myself being got. You're tough. I like that. It works better with me than a hard-luck story. Tell me, you wanted for anything?"

"Nope."

"Ever done time?"

"Once. Thirty days. Vagrancy."

"Nothing else on the blotter?"

"Nope."

"Can you give off a smile? You'd freeze the customers." Suzy grinned at Fauna.

"Good lord!" said Fauna. "You look like somebody's sister! I'm afraid you'll cost me something. Why do I have to be soft? Have you ever worked in a house?"

"Nope."

"Well, it ain't as bad as the street. Doc Wilkins will be in tomorrow."

Suzy asked, "Can I get my suitcase?"

"I guess so." Fauna opened a wallet on her desk. "J. C. Penny's is open till six. Get yourself a dress—fancy but cheap. Get a new toothbrush. And when you come back, for heaven's sake, go to work on your hair. You could be a good-looking kid if you worked it up."

"I've been sitting in a bus," said Suzy.

"That'll do it," said Fauna. "We eat at half past six. How long since you ate?"

"Yesterday."

"Beef stew tonight, creamed carrots, cherry jelly for dessert."

On her way to the door, Suzy paused and her hand patted the door-frame. "A cop was asking me questions today," she said. "Name's Joe Blaikey."

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" He's a nice fella. Why, he'd lend you money," said Fauna.

" That's what he said," Suzy replied. " I love beef stew . . ."

At the Golden Poppy, Ella handed the suitcase over the counter. " You look like a kid who's got a job," said Ella.

" It looks like it. Say, where's J. C. Penny's? "

" Turn right and go a block and a half. It has a yellow front. Be seeing you."

" Sure," said Suzy.

On the pavement Joe Blaikey fell into step beside her and took her suitcase from her hand. " That's a good girl," he said. " You'll be all right."

" How did you know? " Suzy asked.

" She called me," said Joe. " See you around."

" O.K.," said Suzy. She took her suitcase and turned into J. C. Penny's.

" Can I help you? "

" A dress. Not too dear."

" Over here."

" I like that tomatoey one."

" That's a new shade. ' Love Apples.' "

" Tomato colour."

" It's rayon. It'll give you good service."

" It'd better. Size twelve."

" Shoes to match? "

Suzy took a very deep breath. " Yes, by gosh! " she said.

For days the flame burnt in Doc, his phoenix thought. True, he didn't have a proper microscope, but he had eyes and he had, thank heaven, an analytic mind that could slough off sensations, emotions, pains. As he stared at the octopi, his thesis—*Symptoms in some Cephalopods approximating Apoplexy*—took form.

With a glass needle he stimulated one to fear and rage until it attacked and killed its brother. He removed one passive octopus to a separate jar where he subjected it to mild solutions of menthol, of Epsom salts, sickening it a little and then bringing it back to health again. Then he roused rage, and when the body colours pulsed and changed, he introduced a small amount of cocaine sulphate and saw the emotion disappear into sleep, if you can say an octopus sleeps. Then he roused it with saline and touched it here and there with the frustrating needle, noted the flush, the growing intensity of colour, the uncertain whipping and groping of the arms, until suddenly it collapsed and died. Doc removed the body and dissected the tissue, trying to find burst vesicles.

" It works! " he said aloud. " I haven't proper equipment to

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see how it happens, but this animal dies with the appearance of apoplexy. There must be leakage, even if I can't see it. I can start my paper with observation."

Doc bought a package of yellow pads and two dozen pencils. He laid them out on his desk, the pencils sharpened to needle-points and lined up like yellow soldiers. At the top of a page he printed: OBSERVATIONS AND SPECULATIONS. His pencil-point broke. He took up another and drew lace around the O and the B, made a block letter of the S and put fish-hooks on each end. His ankle itched. He rolled down his sock and scratched, and that made his ear itch.

"Someone's talking about me," he said and looked at the yellow pad. He wondered whether he had fed the cotton rats. It is easy to forget when you're thinking.

Watching the rats scrabble for the food he gave them, Doc remembered that he had not eaten. When he finished a page or two, he would fry some eggs. But wouldn't it be better to eat first so that his flow of thought would not be interrupted later? For some days he had looked forward to this time of peace, of unbroken thought. These were the answer to his restlessness: peace and the life of the mind. It would be better to eat first.

He fried two eggs and ate them, staring at the yellow pad under the hanging light. The light was too bright. It reflected painfully on the paper. Doc finished his eggs, got out a sheet of tracing-paper, and taped it to the bottom of the shade below the globe. It took time to make it neat.

He sat in front of the yellow pad again and drew lace round all the letters of the title, tore off the page, and threw it away. Five pencil-points were broken now. He sharpened them and lined them up with their brothers.

A car drove up in front of the Bear Flag. Doc went to the window and looked out. No one he knew, but he saw Mack go into the grocery. He remembered he wanted to ask Mack something.

It's always hard to start to concentrate. The mind darts like a chicken, trying to escape thinking, even though thinking is the most rewarding function of man. Doc could take care of this. When you know what you're doing, you can handle it. He set his jaw and was starting to turn back to his desk when he saw out of the corners of his eyes the flash of a skirt. He looked out of the window again.

A girl had come out of the Bear Flag and was walking along Cannery Row towards Monterey. Doc couldn't see her face, but she had a fine walk, thigh and knee and ankle swinging free and proud, no jerk and totter the way so many women walked as they

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fell from step to step. No, this girl walked with her shoulders back and her chin up and her arms swinging in rhythm.

It's a gay walk, Doc thought. You can tell so much by a walk—discouragement or sickness, determination. There are squinched-up mean walks and blustering walks, shy, creeping walks, but this was a gay walk, as though the walker were going happily to a meeting with someone she loved. There was pride in the walk, too, but not vanity. Doc hoped she would not turn the corner, but she did. There was a flick of skirt and she was gone. But Doc could see in his mind her swinging limbs, the melody of her lithe, swift movement. Probably ugly as a mud fence, he thought, and then he laughed at himself.

"That's full circle," he said. "Mind, I congratulate you. You jumped me to sex, translated it to aesthetics, and ended with sour grapes. How dishonest can I be? And all because I don't want to go to work. I'll work my head off to avoid work. Come, mind. This time you don't get away with it—back to the desk."

He picked up a pencil and wrote: *The observed specimens were twenty-eight small octopi taken in the inter-tidal zone near the town of La Jolla. Specimens were placed in a large aquarium under conditions as nearly approximating their natural habitat as possible. Sea-water was continuously filtered and replaced every twenty-four hours. Animals from a typical ecological community were introduced together with sand, rock, and algae taken from the collecting-point. Small crustaceans were supplied. In spite of precautions, five specimens died within one week. The remaining fifteen seemed to become acclimatized and readily captured and consumed the small grapsoid crabs placed in the aquarium. The lights—*

His pencil-point broke. He took another, and it broke with a jerk, making a little tear in the paper. He read what he had written; dull, desiccated, he thought. Why should I presume that an animal so far removed from the human—Perhaps I'm fooling myself. The middle voice sang subtly, "Looking for yourself in the water—searching, little man, among the hydroids for your soul—looking for contentment in vanity. Are you better than the rest that you should use the secret priestly words of science to cover the fact that you have nothing to say?"

And the bottom voice mourned, "Lonesome! Lonesome! Let me up into the light and warmth. Lonesome!"

Doc jumped up and went to the aquarium and stared into the lighted water. From under a rock an octopus looked out and one of its arms flicked rhythmically, as though it led an orchestra, and the beat was gay and free and fluid—like the swinging thigh and knee and ankle.

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Doc put his face in the palm of his hand and pressed blackness on his eyes until specks of green and red light swarmed on his vision. Then he got up and went across the street for beer.

To a casual observer, Cannery Row, after the war, might have seemed a series of self-contained and selfish units, each functioning alone with no reference to the others. There was little visible connection between La Ida's, the Bear Flag, the grocery (still known as Lee Chong's Heavenly Flower Grocery), the Palace Flophouse, and the Western Biological Laboratory. The fact is that each was bound by gossamer threads of steel to all the others—hurt one, and you aroused vengeance in all. Let sadness come to one, and all wept.

Doc was more than first citizen of Cannery Row. He was healer of the wounded soul and the cut finger. Strongly entrenched in legality though he was, he found himself constantly edged into infringements by the needs of his friends, and anyone could touch him for a dollar without half trying. When trouble came to Doc, it was everybody's trouble.

What was Doc's trouble? Even he didn't know. He was deeply, grievingly unhappy. For hours on end he sat at his desk with a yellow pad before him and his needle-sharp pencils lined up. Sometimes his waste-basket was full of crushed, scribbled pages, and at others not even a doodle went down. Then he would move to the aquarium and stare into it. And his voices howled and cried and moaned. "Write!" said his top voice, and "Search!" sang his middle voice, and his lowest voice sighed, "Lonesome! Lonesome!"

He did not go down without a struggle. He resurrected old love affairs, he swam deep in music, he read the *Sorrows of Werther*; but the voices would not leave him. The beckoning yellow pages became his enemies. One by one the octopi died in the aquarium. He had worn thin the excuse of his lack of a proper microscope. When the last octopus died, he leapt on this as his excuse. When his friends visited him, he would explain, "You see, I can't go on without specimens, and I can't get any more until the spring tides. As soon as I have specimens and a new microscope, I can whip the paper right off."

His friends sensed his pain and caught it and carried it away with them. They knew the time was coming when they would have to do something.

In the Palace Flophouse a little meeting occurred—occurred, because no one called it, no one planned it, and yet everyone knew what it was about.

Wide Ida, proprietress of the Café La Ida, brooded hugely.

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The Bear Flag was represented by Agnes, Mabel, and Becky. All the boys were accounted for. The meeting began casually and obliquely, as all meetings should.

Hazel, one of the boys from the Palace, said, " Wide Ida throwed out a drunk last night and sprained her shoulder."

" I ain't as young as I used to be," Wide Ida said gloomily.

" The drunk dared her," said Hazel. " He didn't even touch the pavement going out. If there was an Olympic event for chucking-out, Wide Ida would win it easy."

" Sprained my shoulder up," said Wide Ida.

They kept skirting their problem. Mack, the leader of the Flophouse boys, said, " How's Fauna been? "

" Pretty good. She's got problems," said Agnes.

Becky was delicately picking off nail-polish. " That Fauna," she said, " she's a wonder. She's giving us table-setting lessons. I bet if there was thirty-five forks, she'd know what every one of them was for."

" Ain't they to eat with? " Hazel asked.

" Lord, what a ignorant! " said Becky. " I bet you don't know a dessert fork from a hole in the ground."

Wide Ida asked, " Any change with Doc? "

" No," said Mack. " I went over to see him last night. I wisht there was something we could do."

They fell to musing. If the times were hard on Doc, they were equally hard on his friends who loved him. Once he had been infallible. There was nothing he could not do because there was nothing he very much wanted to do. And in spite of themselves a little contempt for him was growing in his friends—a kind and loving contempt that might never have happened if he had not once been so great. People who had once spoken his name with awe now felt better than he because he was no better than they.

" I ain't got an idea how to proceed," said Mack.

Hazel said, " How about if we ask Fauna to do his horoscope? She's doing me right now."

" You ain't got no future," said Mack.

" I have too," said Hazel. " I bet Fauna could tell us what to do about Doc."

Mack looked interested. " It's better than nothing," he said. " *Hoc sunt*. Eddie, you dig up one of them kegs you buried during the war. Hazel, you ask Fauna to come over for a drink. Tell her to bring her star stuff."

" Maybe she's got me finished," said Hazel.

It was a matter of some sorrow to Fauna that she didn't entirely believe in astrology, but she had found that nearly everyone

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wants to believe that the stars take notice of us. Her science gave her a means for telling people what they ought to do, and Fauna had definite ideas about what everybody ought to do. In spite of her secret scepticism, every once in a while she turned up a reading that astonished her. Hazel's horoscope had her breathless and baffled. She seriously considered burning it and never telling him.

Hazel led her to the Palace Flophouse and Mack poured her a drink from the keg. She tossed it off, still deep in thought.

"You got my stars wrote down?" Hazel demanded.

Fauna regarded him sorrowfully. "I don't want to tell you," she said.

"Why not? Is it bad?"

"Awful," said Fauna.

"Come on, tell me. I can take it."

Fauna sighed. "I've checked it over and over," she said. "You sure you give me your true birthday?"

"Sure."

"Then I don't see how it can be wrong." She turned wearily and faced the others. "The stars say Hazel's going to be President of the United States."

There was a shocked silence.

"I don't believe it," said Mack.

"I don't want to be President," Hazel said, and he didn't.

"There is no choice," said Fauna. "The stars have spoke. You will go to Washington."

"I don't want to!" Hazel cried. "I don't know nobody there."

"I wonder where we could all go," said Whitey No. 2, a newcomer at the Palace. "I seen some islands in the Pacific that was pretty nice. But heck—Hazel would have them too. The U.S.'ve got a mandate."

"I won't take it," said Hazel.

Mack said, "We could kill him."

"His stars don't say it," Fauna said. "He's going to live to seventy-eight and die from a spoilt oyster."

"I don't like oysters," said Hazel.

"Maybe you'll learn in Washington."

"Maybe you made a mistake," Mack said to Fauna.

"That's what I hoped," she said. "I went over and over it. No, sir! Hazel is going to be President."

"Well, we've weathered some pretty bad ones," Eddie, one of the barmen at La Ida, offered forlornly.

"Ain't there no way I can tell them I won't do it? Hell, I'll hide out!" said Hazel desperately.

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Fauna shook her head dismally. "I'll check again," she said, "but I don't think you have a chance. You've got nine toes, Hazel?"

"I don't know."

"Well, count."

Hazel took off his shoes and moved his lips. "Nine," he said bitterly.

"That's what the horoscope said. We can only pray it's for the best."

"That's what I call a nine-to-one prayer," said Whitey No. 2. "Fauna, now you've gone and made a president out of a sow's ear, how about getting Doc's paper wrote?"

"Who's a sow's ear?" Hazel demanded.

Agnes piped up in her hoarse soprano, "Doc just ain't himself. I took him a pint and he didn't hardly pass the time o' day. Just set there looking at that yellow paper. Know what was on that paper?"

"Eggs," said Whitey No. 1, Wide Ida's chief barman.

"No. I don't like to tell. It ain't nice."

"Boy!" said Mack. "Maybe he's getting well. Go on—what?"

"Well," said Agnes in a shocked voice, "he'd drew a picture of a lady without no clothes on, and right beside that was one of them damn devil-fish, only it was smoking a pipe. Don't hardly seem like the old Doc."

Wide Ida shook herself out of a mountainous lethargy. "He used to be the easy-goin'est guy in the world. Now he's struck a bad patch. Anybody else but Doc, I'd figure it was a dame. But Doc can take dames or let them alone."

Mack said, "He could even take dames *and* let them alone."

Fauna put her hands on her hips. "You fellas sure there ain't a girl hiding out where he can't get to her?"

"No," said Hazel. "I wisht he'd snap out of it. Go over and talk to him, and he don't say nothing and he don't listen."

"Let's run a few dames past him and see if he picks up," said Whitey No. 2.

Mack said, "I don't believe in it but I wish Fauna would do a job on Doc. Might give us an idea."

Fauna said, "I never seen nobody that wanted me to do a horoscope that believed in it. I ain't sure I believe in it myself. Sure, I'll do Doc. When's his birthday?"

With surprise they realized that no one could remember.

"Seems like it was in the autumn," said Eddie.

"Got to have it," Fauna said. "Mack, you think you could find out?"

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"I guess so. Say, Fauna, if you ain't got too much integrity, could you maybe rig it a little?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, kind of tell him to lay off his darn paper and get back to horsing around."

"What's wrong with his paper if only he gets it wrote?" Hazel demanded.

Mack scratched his stomach. "I guess we got to face it," he said. "Doc wants to write that crazy paper. Driving himself nuts with it. Know what I think? Doc ain't never going to write that paper."

Hazel stood up. "What d'you mean?"

"Well, you know them kind of people they call accident-prone? No matter what they do, they get hurt. It's like they *want* accidents. Well, I think Doc don't really want to write that paper."

Whitey No. 1 said, "He sure goes about it the hard way."

"Ever hear of a substitute?" said Mack.

"You mean like a reserve on a team?" Eddie asked.

"Hell, no!" said Mack. "I mean when a guy is using something to cover up something else—and maybe he don't even know it himself."

Hazel demanded, "You running Doc down?"

"Take it easy," said Mack. "I think Doc's scared to write that paper because he knows it's crazy. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*"

"Huh?" asked Fauna.

"Q.E.D.," said Mack.

"Oh!" said Fauna. "Sure."

Back again at the Bear Flag, Fauna beat her forehead suddenly with the heel of her hand.

"I nearly forgot! Joe Elegant baked a darn great big cake. Suzy, you take four cold tins of beer and that cake and go over and give them to Doc to cheer him up."

"O.K.," said Suzy. "But it'll probably stick in his stomach."

"His stomach ain't none of your business," said Fauna.

When Suzy had gone, Fauna said, "I wisht I could get a husband for that kid. She don't hardly pull her own weight here."

Suzy was light on her feet. She was up the stairs and knocking on the door of the Western Biological before the snakes rattled. Doc called, "Come in," without looking up from his microscope.

Suzy stood in the doorway. She held a gigantic cake on one hand and carried a paper bag of tinned beer in the other.

"How do you do," she said formally.

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Doc looked up. "Oh, hullo. For heaven's sake, what's that?"

"A cake. Joe Elegant made it."

"Why?" Doc asked.

"I think Fauna told him to."

"Well, I hope you like cake," said Doc.

Suzy laughed. "I don't think this is a eating cake. This is for looking at. Fauna sent you some beer."

"That's more like it," said Doc. "What's Fauna want?"

"Nothing."

"That's funny."

"Where shall I put the cake?" said Suzy.

Now Doc looked at Suzy and Suzy looked at Doc and they both had the same thought and they burst into laughter. Tears streamed from Suzy's eyes.

"Oh, lord!" said Suzy. "Oh, lord!"

She laughed with her mouth wide open and her eyes pinched shut. Doc slapped his leg and threw back his head and roared. And the laughter was so pleasant they tried to keep it going after its momentum was spent.

"Oh, lord," said Suzy, "I got to wipe my eyes." She put the cake down on top of the rattlesnake cage, and hysterical rattling filled the room.

Suzy jumped back. "What's that?"

"Rattlesnakes."

"I'd hate to live with a bunch of dirty snakes."

Doc leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs. He said, "You know, this interests me. Snakes are cleaner than most animals. Wonder why you call them dirty?"

Suzy looked at him levelly. "You want to know why? Because you run Fauna down. You said she's trying to get something out of you. She just did it to be nice."

"It was just a joke," said Doc. "Why, Fauna's one of my best friends. Let's have a tin of beer and make peace."

"O.K.," said Suzy. "You make the first move."

Doc said, "Tell Joe Elegant it's an incredible cake."

"Got marsh-mallow icing," said Suzy.

"And tell Fauna the beer saved my life."

Suzy's face relaxed. "O.K.," she said. "I guess that's O.K. Where's the opener?"

"Right in the sink back there."

Suzy brought the two punched tins to Doc's work-table.

"Say, what are you doing?"

"Making slides. When I started I put starfish sperm and ova in each of these glasses. Then every half-hour I kill one glass

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of the developing embryos, and when I have the whole series, I mount them on slides like this, and one slide shows the whole development."

Suzy bent over the dishes.

"I don't see nothing."

"They're too small. I can show you in the glass."

Suzy straightened up.

"What do you do it for?"

"So students can see how starfish get to be."

"Why do they want to know?"

"Well, I guess because that's the way people get to be."

"Then why don't they study people?"

Doc laughed. "Here, take a look." He pushed a glass dish under the microscope.

Suzy peered in the eyepieces. "Good lord!" she said. "Did I look like that once?"

"Something like."

"Sometimes I feel like that now. Say, Doc, you got a funny business—bugs and all like that."

"There are funnier businesses," he said sharply.

She stiffened. "Meaning my business? You don't like my business, huh?"

"It doesn't matter whether I like it or not. There it is. But it does seem to me a kind of sad substitute for love—a kind of lonesome substitute."

Suzy put her hands on her hips. "And what've you got, mister? Bugs, snakes? Look at this dump! Floor ain't been cleaned in years. You ain't got a decent suit of clothes. You probably can't remember your last hot meal. You sit here breeding bugs. What do you think that's a substitute for?"

In the old days Doc would have been amused, but now his guard was down and he caught her anger like a disease. "I do what I want," he said. "I live the way I want. I'm free—do you get that? I'm free and I do what I want."

"You ain't got nothing," Suzy said. "Bugs and snakes and a dirty house. I bet some dame threw you over. That's what you're substituting for. Got a wife? No! Got a girl? No!"

Doc found himself shouting, "I don't want a wife. I have all the women I want!"

"Woman and women is two different things," said Suzy. "A guy knows all about women—he don't know nothing about a woman."

Doc said, "This guy is happy that way."

"Now you're happy!" said Suzy. "You're a push-over! If no dame's got you, it's because no dame wants you. Who the

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hell would want to live with bugs and snakes in a joint like this?"

"Who'd want to go to bed with anybody that's got three bucks," said Doc cruelly.

Suzy said icily, "A smart guy. A real smart guy. He's got what he wants. Seems to me I heard you're writing a darn great big high-faluting paper."

"Who told you that?"

"Everybody knows about it. Everybody's laughing at you behind your back—and you know why? Because everybody knows you're kidding yourself. You ain't never going to write that paper because you can't write that paper. You're just sitting here like a kid playing wishing games."

She saw her words go home as surely as though she had watched arrows drive into his chest, and misery and shame overwhelmed her.

"I wish I hadn't said that," she spoke softly. "I wish to God I never said that."

"It may be true," said Doc quietly. "Maybe you put your finger on the truth. Is everybody laughing at me? Is everybody laughing at me?"

"My name's Suzy," she said.

"Are they laughing, Suzy?"

"They got no right to," she said. "I was just fighting back—honest to God, I was. I didn't mean any of that stuff I said."

"I love true things," said Doc. "Even when they hurt. Isn't it better to know the truth about oneself?" And he asked it of himself. "Yes, I think it is. I think it is. You're quite right, I've got nothing. That's why I built up the whole story about my paper until I believed it myself—a little man pretending to be a big man, a fool trying to be wise."

"Fauna will kill me," Suzy moaned. "She'll wring my neck. Say, Doc, you've got no right to take angry talk from a small-time hustler—you've got no right."

"What's it matter where the truth comes from," he said, "if it's the truth?"

Suzy said, "Doc, I never felt so rotten in my life. Get mad at me, won't you?"

"Why should I get mad? Maybe you've stopped a bunch of nonsense. Perhaps you've nipped a fool in the bud."

"Get mad at me," she begged. "Here! Take a punch at me."

Doc chuckled.

"I wish it could be that easy."

Suzy said sadly, "Then I ain't got any choice," and she shrilled at him, "Why, you—you lousy fool! Who the hell d'you think you are?"

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There was a flutter of footsteps and the door burst open.

It was Becky.

"Suzy! You're late. The Coyote Club's here. Come on! Get into your tomato dress."

"It's called 'Love Apples,'" said Suzy quietly. "So long, Doc," and she followed Becky out.

Doc watched them go.

He said aloud, "That's probably the only completely honest human I have ever met."

His eyes wandered to the table and suddenly he bellowed, "*Damn it*, she made me miss the time. Now I've got to do it all over again." And he dumped the contents of the glass dishes into his slop bucket.

Further chapters from John Steinbeck's "Sweet Thursday" will appear in next month's Argosy on sale October 8.

* * *

FULL MARKS

Stories about the Marx Brothers are often misquoted, and sometimes become unrecognizable. One anecdote, better than most, is told of Harpo's visit to the South of France, where he stayed with Alexander Woollcott. Hearing that George Bernard Shaw was staying nearby, Harpo persuaded his host to invite the great man to lunch, and on the appointed day was sunbathing in the nude when he suddenly realized that a tall bearded figure was standing over him.

"I'm Harpo Marx," he said, holding out his hand.

"I'm Bernard Shaw," replied the visitor, neatly whipping away the towel from Harpo and leaving him naked. "And this is Mrs. Shaw!"

Another of the many stories concerns Groucho, who is alleged to have applied for membership of an exclusive New York club. When he was told that his application was accepted he is said to have pointed out that no club with a good reputation could possibly accept Groucho Marx as a member—therefore he would rather stay away.

And he did.

Another tale relates how Groucho was once asked to review a book for a newspaper. But when he submitted the review he added the note: "I was so busy writing the review that I never got around to reading the book. Is it good?"

JOHN MONTGOMERY, *Comedy Films*

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MATA MEANS DEATH

Nearer and nearer in the darkness of the cave something was approaching

by WILLIAM WALLACE IRWIN

"GENTLEMEN, I give you my word that I consider that smiling little valley the most dangerous spot in France. The records of the commune show that on an average the place has known at least one strange and violent death every year for the last two hundred and fifty years, and the oral traditions of the peasants say that it has always been the same in that evil hollow."

The speaker was the Colonel Baron de Bajac, Commander of the Legion of Honour, graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique, a hero of Verdun where he had left one foot and half of a cheek-bone, who was now spending his later years on the small estate that had been in his family for centuries. Following the pleasant French custom, to honour him the inhabitants of the nearby village of Comiac had elected him their mayor. Officially he was mayor, but actually he was honorary grandfather to the entire commune; supplying the children with toys, gossiping with the old folk, giving sage advice to the youngsters leaving for their military service, and—most important—settling disputes between peasants and persuading them to avoid the loved but expensive pleasures of a lawsuit.

On the morning in question we were taking our breakfast on the sunny terrace behind the castle of Bajac, when the Baron's speech was interrupted by the entrance of a little fat man, waving his hands and obviously greatly excited. He burst into a veritable fountain of words, but was checked by the upraised hand of the Baron, "Calm yourself, my friend. Sit down and join us in a cup of coffee, and then tell your story tranquilly. Gentlemen, may I present the Doctor Olivier Magnan, my very faithful and efficient assistant."

Doctor Magnan gulped a couple of times and did as he had been told; however, after one sip of coffee, he could contain himself no longer, and burst forth, "Monsieur le Maire, there has been another death at Mata! Madame Motteaux, coming to market with her eggs and geese, saw the body at the foot of the cliff and came with the news to me. It is old Père Mathieu."

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De Bajac jumped to his feet. "Père Mathieu! But he belongs to the district! What was he doing in Mata after dark? He certainly knew better."

"Who can tell, Monsieur le Maire? Of course, he was drunk as he always has been for the last fifty years. It is possible that he was confused and turned west instead of east when he wanted to return to his hut."

Looking exceedingly worried, the Baron let himself drop into his wicker armchair, thought for a moment, and then began, "It will be about fifteen minutes before the gendarmes get here, and I shall try to explain my attitude in the matter. My education, my career, and my cast of mind tend to make me anything but superstitious, but I cannot resist a feeling that there is something supernatural, something that science cannot yet account for, in that Vale of Mata. The name means Death, and it was well chosen.

"Let me—in as objective a manner as possible—explain what always happens. Always the dead are found in the same spot, having seemingly fallen over a cliff some fifty feet high. Over a century ago a wall was built beside the road that runs along the top of the cliff, but despite that, the dead are still found in the same spot, having climbed *or been thrown* over the wall."

The little, dried-up man rose, and limping up and down the flag-paved terrace, continued: "The bodies are, of course, badly shattered by falling from such a height onto a talus of angular stones, but in addition, always has there been noted some wound, some disfigurement, some monstrous injury that cannot be accounted for merely by the effect of the fall."

The Baron paused a moment and his bright blue Gascon eyes became reflective. "I cannot explain it. When the sun is up, Mata is a charming, shallow valley, facing the south, with a huge pinnacle of rock in the middle. The soil is rich and the location ideal for a farm or vineyard, but never in recorded history has it been inhabited. Not only that, but although the main road crosses it, there is not a peasant for twenty miles around who would set foot in the place after sunset. Till now, the victims have always been travellers and strangers to the countryside."

He stopped and gazed earnestly at Professor Dufresne and then at me.

"Gentlemen, you well know that I am not a man to be easily scared—I have faced death too often—but I tell you frankly that nothing but the imperious call of duty would ever make me set foot in that valley after sunset. There is a power there that is evil beyond all human knowledge, and . . . I fear it!"

At this moment we heard in the courtyard the wheezy rattle

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and snort of one of those strange, antique, mechanical contraptions that—possibly under the impression that they are motorcars—the French administration supplies to its police.

The Baron turned to us. "I trust that you gentlemen will accompany us. I am anxious to have the opinion of scientific observers of your standing—and also to have your unofficial opinion when we are alone. As I have just explained, there is more here than the death of the village drunkard by falling from a cliff."

I should perhaps explain that I, Alan Dene, teach archaeology. As I was spending my sabbatical year in France, Professor Dufresne of the Sorbonne—author of many authoritative works on the prehistory of his country—was kind enough to offer to guide me through the caves in the valley of the Dordogne; those grottoes on the walls of which prehistoric man has left such wonderful paintings. A distant cousin of the widowed Baron de Bajac, he had a standing invitation to stay in the ancient castle when visiting Périgord, and the Baron had insisted on my sharing his hospitality.

About a mile from the village the road crossed the lower end of a lovely semicircular valley, sloping gently upward for a couple of hundred yards to a high peak of rock that entered it like a great wedge.

"Look, gentlemen, this wall that divides the road from the cliff is of stone and cement, and has purposely been built four feet high. So that no one can fall over it by accident. Yet, since it was built in 1900, more than forty people have been found dead on the rocks below the cliff!"

We got out of the car and inspected the wall with care, but could not find a scratch or sign of anything abnormal above the body that we could see sprawled on the talus some fifty feet below.

"Note well," said the Baron, "that Père Mathieu always wore iron-shod sabots, and if he had climbed the wall there would certainly be scratches. Now, let us go down and inspect the body."

A steep and narrow path led us down to the slope of large rocks on which, face to the sky, lay the flattened body of the unfortunate peasant. Doctor Magnan evidently knew his business, and his examination was complete and competent.

"Back of the skull crushed, obviously by that rock which fits the wound. Spine broken—the ridge on which he lies accounts for that. But, gentlemen, I earnestly call your attention to the circular bruise going entirely around each upper arm—no fall ever made them, and"—he raised the chin of the dead man—

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" how are we to account for that? " The throat was torn and ragged, like the throat of a salmon bitten by an otter. " And," the doctor continued, " do you not notice a strange, foul odour, unlike anything you have ever encountered? "

Père Mathieu was duly buried in the village cemetery among twenty generations of his forefathers; the police made a perfunctory investigation, and then the affair was dropped. As the commander of the local gendarmes stated, " In our commune we have had these strange deaths for centuries, and have never found any way to account for them."

Professor Dufresne guided me through the various caves as he had promised, but even while he was most cordially explanatory, I could sense that his mind was occupied with something else—some problem that he could not leave alone, and that was continually forcing its way into his consciousness. Then one evening after dinner, when we were smoking our pipes in the gothic living-room of the castle, he opened his mind.

" My dear Gaetan," he said, addressing the Baron. " I have been thinking for the last ten days about the mystery of the Vale of Mata, and I have a feeling—for it is only a feeling—that the cause of all those deaths is somehow connected with the rocky peak in the centre of the valley . . . and I intend to explore that. Now, do not try to argue about the danger: I fully realize that, and I intend to work only between ten and four, while the valley is full of sunshine."

The little brown face of the Baron, wrinkled like a walnut-shell, broke into a grin. " You always were tactful, my dear Antoine, and never more than this evening. Having heard of my fear of the place, you refrain entirely from suggesting that you would like my company, knowing full well—you old rascal—that my pride will not let me abstain."

He turned to me, " You see how it is, Professor; everybody, both in the family and in the commune, takes advantage of me! "

Provided with the necessary tools, we three—for, of course, I refused to stay behind—arrived in the ominous valley at ten the next morning and halted the car at the base of the great outcrop. The southern face was roughly triangular, about one hundred feet wide and the same in height; at the base were a few large rocks that had fallen from above in the course of the centuries, but there was no talus, properly speaking.

Dufresne examined closely the base of the rock, and then exclaimed, " I was right! Look, here is a faint track made by some animal; I am almost ready to bet that if we can tip this slab out of the way we shall find the entrance to a cave behind it."

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It was a difficult job, but with the aid of the jack from the car and the Baron's training as an engineer, by noon the great slab had been put out of balance and tipped forward on its face. Behind it—exactly as the Professor had foreseen—was an opening roughly four feet high by two wide.

To be frank, none of us rushed to be first to enter the cave; each of us looked at the other two with a little embarrassed smile.

" I think," said the Baron, " as it is now noon, we shall go home to lunch. After a good meal we may all feel braver." It takes a really courageous man to say things like that.

When we returned, armed with an oil lamp and several large electric torches, Dufresne at once entered the cave, followed by his cousin, with myself bringing up the rear. After about sixty feet of a low, crooked but unencumbered passage, the cave widened out into a high, roughly circular room, about thirty feet across. That it had once been inhabited was proved by a smoke-blackened space on one wall but, to our disappointment, the aboriginal inhabitants had left no decorations for two professors of prehistory to photograph and write books about. Still, from the point of view of a cave-man, it was a commodious, all-the-year family residence, furnished with all modern improvements, which is to say that the cave was well drained and dry, the entrance was low, narrow, and easily defended, and there was a smoke-vent.

Dufresne rubbed a testing finger on the smoke-darkened wall. " See," he said, " there is nothing left of the soot but a black stain. There has been no fire in historic times, and until we find an artefact, we cannot even guess when the last one went out."

He squatted and raked in the ancient hearth. " No sign of a fire here; we are standing on debris that has crumbled from the walls or sifted in during thousands of years. Gaetan, do you think it possible to find anyone to assist us with the work of excavation, or are they all too scared of the valley? "

" Well," the Baron ruminated, " there are a couple of the village boys back from the war in Korea. They have seen and undergone a lot and are pretty hard-boiled. If I tactfully hint that they are scared, perhaps I can persuade them . . . especially if the pay is good."

It appeared that the Baron's tact was successful, for the next morning found us at work with the necessary tools and two intelligent helpers. At first they were decidedly nervous, but that wore off as the days passed and they became interested in the work and our comments. We began by removing the surface soil to the depth of about six inches, carrying it outside and sifting it for any small fragment it might contain, and repeating the process again and again.

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It was monotonous work, with nothing to reward our efforts until one morning something clicked against a trowel and one of the helpers handed a stone to the Baron—" There, Monsieur le Maire, there's something at last." The object was a small tool in flaked stone, possibly used in dressing hides.

Dufresne took it reverently from his cousin's hand. " Flaked stone," he said. " Estimated to be about 50,000 years old. Be very careful from now on, boys. Use the little trowels and your fingers; we don't care how slowly you go, so long as nothing is damaged. Begin under the smoke."

A few minutes' work brought to light the relics of the family hearth; all traces of wood had long disappeared, but fragments of charred bone clearly showed the site. Dufresne's thin Norman face was wreathed in smiles, but his cousin was practical.

" No doubt science—particularly prehistory—is wonderful, but I call your attention to two other neglected scientific facts—first, it is noon, and second, for lunch la vieille Marie is offering a stuffed goose-neck, followed by a truffled pheasant, each of which will also be wonderful."

When we got out in the hot sunshine, Dufresne remembered that he had laid the scraper on the ground when he stooped to examine the remains of the fire, and I—being the nearest to the entrance—turned back to get it. As I crossed the cave, I tripped over a shovel and fell heavily, dropping my torch which went out and rolled away, leaving me in the dark.

I was not the least panicky, having no reason to be so; I even stayed prone for a few seconds to catch my breath. As I rose, I knew that all I had to do was to feel my way to the wall and, keeping my fingers against it, follow round until I came to the opening. The darkness in which I was plunged had the peculiar quality of liquid tar; it was soft, all-embracing, and of absolute blackness.

I felt my way round the wall of the cave, but failed to find the opening to the outer air. Not in the least alarmed, I calculated . . . the cave is about fifteen paces across, so it is roughly forty-five paces around. I groped until I found a shovel and laid it at right angles to the wall, but—after I had carefully stepped forty-five times, I returned to the shovel, and . . . I had not found the opening. My brain told me that this was impossible, so again I made the circuit, counting my steps more carefully than before. When again I arrived at the shovel, there was no possible doubt—the passage to the open air had disappeared!

It was then that I really knew fear; here was an ominous something for which I had no rational explanation. I stood like

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a scared child in the dark, sweating, listening, and holding my breath, and . . . I heard something moving. My scientific mind, trained to observe and remember, recorded a strange prickling of my scalp, and I felt my close-cropped hair rising and stiffening like quills. I was suffering from horrible, primitive fear, not of death but of the mysterious and unknown.

Not a sound of breathing could I hear, strain my ears as I would, but I sensed something bulky, something heavy that was slowly approaching. At the same time a foul smell came in whiffs to my flaring nostrils, a mixture of the musky smell of an old he-goat, and the sickly, heavy odour of decaying human flesh.

I stood still and waited. Nearer and nearer in the blackness, something bulky approached; I could still hear no sound of breathing. Finally, a paw fell heavily on my shoulder.

At that touch, all my war-time commando training came back with a rush, and I became cool and deadly. With both hands I grabbed at the wrist of the thing, stepped back, stooped, and pivoted. Helped by its own force, a great body flew through the air and struck the opposite wall with a muffled thud. There was a moment's pause, and then the thing rushed on me.

Apparently it could see in the dark, for without any fumbling I was seized by each upper arm with a grip that made me scream with pain. Automatically, I countered by snapping up my knee with my whole strength. Again I was free. I put my back against the wall and prepared for a new assault.

I was almost helpless as my arms had been half paralysed by the thing's iron grip, and an instant later I was completely powerless in an embrace that crushed me to a barrel-like, hairy chest. To this day I cannot understand why my ribs did not give way, for the strength of the thing was like that of a gorilla. Despite my agony, I was conscious of teeth chattering with rage while a muzzle tore at my windpipe—and I remembered how the throat of Père Mathieu had looked.

The first bite caught nothing but a mouthful of my heavy woollen shirt and my tie, nevertheless I knew that this was the end . . .

"Alan! Alan! What's keeping you?"

Torches flashed in the cave and finally lit on the human wreck that had been me. I was bruised so that I could not move my arms and could scarcely breathe; a huge patch was torn from the throat of my shirt, and—to put it frankly—I stank.

Of the creature that had attacked me there was no sign, not even a print in the dust.

They took me back to the castle and washed me—I demanded that first of all and refused to say a word until it was done.

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When at length I was a bit restored, we held a council of war at which Doctor Magnan opened the discussion by saying, "Gentlemen, as a doctor, it seems to me that I should call your attention to two facts that point to one conclusion and suggest a second. Fact one: the bruises around the arms of Professor Dene are exactly similar to those found on the arms of the late Père Mathieu. Fact two: the—excuse me—odour, which is still faintly noticeable in the vicinity of our injured friend, resembles strangely the one to which I called your attention when we inspected the body of Mathieu. Conclusion: the murderer of the latter was the assailant of Professor Dene. Suggested—but perfectly impossible—conclusion: the same evil entity has been responsible for the centuries of deaths in the Vale of Mata."

"But why did it not harm the cave-men?" someone asked.

"It would appear," said the doctor, "that this evil entity fears the light, and as you know, a perpetual fire on the hearth was a vital necessity to the cave-people."

Professor Dufresne's long, bony face was unusually grave. "One can have been a scientist all one's life, but one cannot escape from the inherited influence of all the lives that have preceded one, and we Normans still have embedded in us many strange feelings and impressions that have come down from our Viking ancestors. One of these impressions is working in my soul at this very instant, but it is so unscientific, so wildly bizarre and grotesque, that I cannot bring myself to put it in words. I shall scrawl a line on paper and ask Gaetan to keep it in his safe until this problem is solved, and then . . . well, we shall see."

I piped up—today I am ashamed of myself, but at the time I was still badly shaken—"What! Are we going back to that horrible place?"

"Why," said the Baron, "it would appear to be definitely proved that the thing, whatever it may be, never appears in the light. Until you were left in the dark, none of us has been conscious of its presence. I think we should continue, with the understanding that there are to be never less than two of us in the place at a time, and that each of us shall always have two electric torches on his person."

A couple of days later we resumed our excavations. It appeared that the cave had been inhabited continuously for many thousands of years, for as we worked gradually lower, the relics that we found became more primitive in type until they ceased entirely, and we were once more in a sterile layer. Professor Dufresne estimated the period of the last flint implement that we found as being at least one hundred thousand years ago.

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The accumulation of deposits that we slowly removed pointed to the fact that the cave had been without inhabitants not for thousands, but for hundreds of thousands of years, and we were beginning to think that there was nothing more between us and bedrock, when the Baron turned up a flint. Only the fact that it was a type of flint of which there was none for miles from the cave, made us take a second look at it, so crude and shapeless did it appear.

Carrying it out into the sunlight, Dufresne studied it closely and finally gave his decision.

"This, gentlemen, to the best of my judgment, is a specimen of the earliest efforts of primitive man to make a flint implement. Those flaked portions are not due to natural agency, they were broken off with a hammer-stone before palaeolithic man had learned the art of pressure-flaking. Age? Estimates vary, but probably half a million years. It takes one's breath away, does it not?"

Then came the find! In the centre of the cave, projecting from the rocky floor, for we were down to the earliest habitation level, was a rounded mound of dried clay, in form something like a short, broad canoe turned upside-down. Carefully removing all the loose material, we measured and photographed it, and then as it was getting late, we returned to the castle.

All that evening Dufresne was plunged in a profound meditation; he asked the Baron for his envelope, held it uncertainly in his fingers for a time, and finally had it put back unopened in the safe. The next morning when we were getting into the car, he disappeared for a time and came back with a large, broad-bladed woodcutter's axe and a flattish billet of oak. These he held in his lap as if they were of vital importance, but he said nothing.

We examined the strange mound with great care, and I called attention to the fact that it was probably hollow. We tried to prise it loose from the floor and turn it over with a crow-bar, but the clay crumbled as the tools were applied to the surrounding rock, and cracks began to appear on its surface. Then the clay cracked from end to end, and at once the cave was filled with the noxious stench with which I was so unfortunately familiar.

Finally, the two sides of the mound rolled apart like a split bowl, and we saw . . .

At first glance one thought of a great and particularly foul ape, but the longer one looked the surer one was that the creature was a man. Hideously and incredibly primitive, it was the mere rough sketch of what in half a million years might develop into a human being. As it lay before us it was evil, evil, evil; *evil* radiated from it—we could almost feel it as heat from a stove!

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The thing was short in stature, with immensely wide shoulders and long arms; from certain parts of the body hung masses of coarse black hair, but not enough to clothe it as an ape is clothed. The most horrible thing about the creature was . . . you knew it was a man.

Under the huge, projecting, bony ridges, the little black pig-like eyes seemed—for they were wide open—to glare hate and malice at us. Above the eyes the skull sloped back, but the clenched jaws pushed forward like those of a gorilla. A great yellow canine tooth, a veritable carnivorous fang, hung from each corner of the mouth.

The Baron broke the silence: " But why isn't it dust? "

Dufresne stooped and laid his hand on the thing. " Flexible, but with a cadaveric chill," he said very quietly. " It is just what I expected, as you will see when you open the envelope in the safe. He was a tribal wizard, probably king and priest also; look at the curious stones arranged around him; the less durable portions of his magical paraphernalia have long been dust. He is what the peasants in the recesses of the Carpathians even today refer to as " un-dead " and what our own ancestors called a vampire. For half a million years this thing has been slaying belated passers-by in the well-named Vale of Mata. Thank God, his evil course is finished today."

" But," said the Baron, " what shall we do? Burn it? "

" No," said the Professor. " There is a better way. I spoke the other night of traditions we Normans had from our Viking ancestors; one of them deals with such cases. There are similar ones in the Icelandic saga of Grettir the Strong. We must act; the thing is not only evil, it is also horribly dangerous, as Alan has cause to know."

Grasping the long hair, he raised the horrible head of the thing, and under its neck thrust the billet of oak he had brought with him. Standing erect, he swung the axe high above his head and with all his force brought the edge down on the extended throat. The head sprang off, and for a flash of time the body writhed and twisted as in agony.

Calling, " Pull its legs apart! " Dufresne once more seized the fearsome head and, when we had obeyed him, laid it between the creature's thighs.

For an instant we were not conscious of any change, then . . . the thing seemed to blur, like a picture slightly out of focus, and while we watched it, it quietly dissolved to the dust that it should have been thousands of centuries before. There was neither sound nor motion, the thing simply faded as does a morning haze before the sun.

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At the end, when nothing was left except some paper-thin fragments of the skull, and a splinter of what had been the lower jaw, something bright caught my eye.

" What is that? " I asked.

" Something it had in its mouth," someone answered.

Stooping down, I picked the object up. It was a portion of my shirt-collar and the tartan tie that the thing had torn from my throat when it attacked me three weeks before!

" But," I stammered, " when it tore at my throat, the floor of the cave was ten feet above where we now stand . . ."

" Yes," said Dufresne. " Interesting, isn't it? "

★ ★ ★

VOLTE-FACE

At fancy dress balls the Marquesa Casati excelled herself, often wearing costumes designed for her in the highest flights of Leon Bakst's fantasy. She once went to the length of gilding Garbi [her slave] when he accompanied her as part of her entrance. Another appearance was made escorted by a live leopard on a chain.

What might perhaps have been her most extravagant disguise never quite came off. Count Etienne de Beaumont had planned a ball, and the Marquesa Casati decided to appear as an electrically equipped Saint Sebastian. She was to wear armour pierced with hundreds of arrows, each studded with glittering stars that were to light up when the Marquesa appeared.

On the morning of the ball, in a little side room at De Beaumont's, she had arrived with her host's permission, bringing a fleet of servants, an electrician, and stoves for boiling water to make cups of tea or coffee while the elaborate preparations for her appearance were in progress.

At last, her *maquillage* complete, her hair fixed in an aureole of ringlets, the Marquesa was pulled into the tights and the armour was fixed on her with a padlock. But at the moment of being plugged in a disaster took place: the costume was short-circuited, and, instead of being lighted up with a thousand stars, the Marquesa suffered an electric shock that sent her into a backward somersault.

She did not recover in time to appear at the party, leaving a note at the De Beaumont house that stated simply, " *Mille regrets.*"

CECIL BEATON, *The Glass of Fashion*

★ ★ ★

When you have finished reading this copy of Argosy, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

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Shore Leave

THIS is the shaft that turns the screw
That pushes the ship that carries the crew
That raises the thirst that craves the brew
That fathers the joys of shore leave.

We steered by the sky, by the stars we knew,
By the saffron sun, by the amber moon,
We sang on the decks, and we drove the bow
Straight for the lights of the town, the town.

The anchor clattered to bite the clay,
The feet were dancing to feel the land,
And the lights burnt brighter for joy that we
Were ashore with pay, with pay to spend.

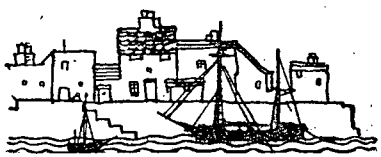
This is the winch that hoists the hook
That loads the freight that pays the cook
That feeds the mate that keeps the book
That records the days of shore leave.

The lights burnt out and the night was through,
The pay was spent and the girls turned cool.
From the bar to the beach, from the wench to the sea,
To the winch, to the watch, to the wheel, the wheel.

We steer by the sea, by the tides we know,
By the log and the card and the sounding-phone,
And we count the watches and tot the pay
For the shore, for the town, the town again.

This is the rivet that cramps the steel
That sheathes the hull that floats the keel
That carries the rudder that answers the wheel
That sets the course towards shore leave.

RAYMOND HULL



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THE DETECTION OF N'KONGO

The pigeon hopped onto the boy's wrist, looking up into his face

by E. C. ANSTEY

TIMBELA MOSHI, impertinently dubbed "bootboy" by his friend Akela, but described more grandiloquently by himself as "'Sistant Wardli" and, by implication, right-hand man to Lieutenant Pinching Jones, known as the Weasel, Intelligence Officer in the Reserved Territory of Fulassi, sat disconsolately on the steps of the Intelligence Office, awaiting the return of his master.

He and Akela were in committee on Ways and Means, for the financial situation was a delicate one. Owing to the departure of the Regiment on manœuvres, Akela's income, drawn exclusively from his fees as a golf caddy, had temporarily come to an end. Timbela's pay was sixpence a week and their minimum expenses were eightpence. Twopence of this went on sugar-cane—an unjustifiable expense, it must be admitted, considering how easily it could be stolen.

The risk was not great for two experienced pilferers, but the results of discovery were too appalling to be faced.

To Timbela Moshi, dismissal from his post, which his buoyant imagination clothed with an importance unmatched in Fulassi, was a fate worse than death.

"Is there *no* way," he asked helplessly, "in which thou canst earn twopence—or a little more—per week?"

Akela turned mournful eyes on his friend and leader, and shook his head sadly.

Timbela gazed across the Cantonment road to the carrier-pigeon loft where Corporal Adamoo, the Weasel's Wardli, was feeding the birds and cleaning out the trap. He announced his decision on their best way out of the impasse with the determined air of a born leader.

"I shall go to confession."

Akela raised his eyes helplessly. "Art thou mad? How can thy White Priest help?"

"Thou dost not understand. The White Priest is a very wonderful man."

"But why confession? Didst thou not tell me that in this

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confession thou sayst like a fool what thou hast done wrong? How will that help to bring money?"

"Listen, Akela, and thou wilt see that it is thou who art the fool. At confession I say, 'Please bless me, Father, for I have sinned,' and the Priest says, 'I do not think, my son, that thou hast sinned very grievously, for thou art a good boy. What hast thou done?'

"And then I say, 'I was angry and I beat Akela on the head.' The White Priest says, 'That is no sin, my son; for Akela is nought but a scallywag and beating is good for him. What else hast thou done?' I say, 'Nothing, Lord Priest.' He says, 'Nonsense! Thou art a mischievous imp; perchance thou hast sinned without knowledge of it.'

"And then the White Priest, who, as I have told you, is a man of wonderful ideas, says, 'Hast thou done this—and that—and that?'—things that thou and I would never think of—and in many of them is there money to be made."

"What kind of things?" asked Akela practically. "Canst thou remember none of them?"

"I . . . I paid no great heed," said Timbela. "There was no need at the time. I did not foresee thy extravagance."

"My extravagance!" exclaimed Akela. "Didst thou not waste one whole penny this morning on a corn-cob for a squalling brat in the market-place?"

"The child was hungry and he was very small. Once I too was often hungry. I know what it means. Was it not my penny? How darest thou question my deeds!" He rose to his feet, girding the loin-cloth round his slim middle. "Take that—and that—and that! Beware, or I will no longer have thee for my follower."

"Thy . . . *follower*!" gasped Akela, indignantly, and turned to leave him.

Timbela saw he had gone too far and caught his arm. "Stay, Akela. I have need of thee and thou hast need of me. It is foolish to quarrel. That brings no money. Stay till I return, and hear what thoughts the White Priest may have."

Akela sat down on the steps of the office, his curiosity overriding his injured pride.

"It is foolishness," he insisted, "but go! Meanwhile I shall tie a coloured rag to the sacred tree by the well. It will perchance serve us better."

"Thy rags! What good hath thy god in the Tree ever done thee?"

"Which is thy god?" countered Akela swiftly. "The god of thy Holy Mullah, Allah, or of the White Priest? Or *mine*?

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For often I have seen thee also tie a rag to his branches."

"Be silent," hissed Timbela furiously, "or thou wilt rouse the anger of one or other and we shall both suffer. Who knows the truth? It is wise to be careful . . ."

"And to make friends with all!" taunted Akela.

Timbela shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows?"

"Is one more powerful than another?" persisted Akela. "I know what my gods can do, for I have seen it."

"What hast thou seen?"

"When, two moons past, I lost my shilling which the Major Lord gave me for finding his golf-balls, I tied a rag to the tree. And behold, within one hour did my shilling fall out of thy loin-cloth, with the black mark on it by which I knew it!"

Timbela waved away an awkward memory.

"What pleasure can tying rags to a tree give a god?" he said contemptuously.

"And what pleasure does thy Eye Lord ever give his God?" asked Akela. "How and when does he worship him? What ceremonies does he perform?"

Instantly Timbela rose to the defence of his beloved master. "My Eye Lord performs many rites and ceremonies," he insisted.

"Such as?"

"He bathes every morning, and often in the evening too."

"Is that a holy rite?"

"Very holy. It is very necessary to be clean to be good."

"Why?"

Timbela often found Akela's searching questions trying. This one was embarrassing; there was a connection between cleanliness and godliness: his White Priest had told it to him once, but he could not remember it.

"The White Man's religion," he explained glibly, "has many mysteries; this is one of them. I must go. See! My Priest goes into his house for his tea. It is a good time for speaking with him."

"Is it also a sacred rite to drink tea?" asked Akela.

"Very sacred and very important. Whenever a follower of the White Man's God has trouble or is ill, always does he drink tea. The effect is wonderful. I have seen it myself when my Eye Lord has been in distress, and a cup of tea, properly and carefully prepared, has worked a miracle."

Akela grunted.

"What will thy holy Mullah say when he sees thee visiting the fat White Priest?"

Timbela waved the objection aside.

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" Be not a fool. The White Man's God and Allah are one and the same: their followers are both 'men of the Book.' It is a different book and they worship in a different way, that is all. Now I go."

Father O'Flynn greeted Timbela warmly, for he was fond of the boy. " Come and sit by me, my boy, while I finish my tea and tell me what divilment ye have been up to. It is long since you came. What have you been doing? "

" Father, I have been angry—"

" With Akela and hit him," added the priest. " Yes, I know that one. Ye spend your life hitting Akela, it seems to me, ye spalpeen. Have ye stolen anything? No—I don't think ye'd do that. Ye might be found out. Have ye cheated anybody? That's more in your line, I'm thinking. Stay, now. What was it I saw the other day?

" Ye were going towards the market with a basket on your head with one of your master's carrier-pigeons in it. Ye weren't going to sell it to a man, knowing that it would fly back to your master's loft, were ye? That would be cheating, Timbela; it would be getting money under false pretences. Ye wouldn't be doing that, now, would ye? "

Timbela's knowledge of English was limited and the Irish accent troubled him; but he knew enough to catch the drift of what the White Priest had said, and he gazed at him with awed admiration.

What a wonderful idea! Why had he and Akela never thought of it? A permanent source of income!

Many of the townspeople kept pigeons, flying free round their huts. A fat pigeon might fetch as much as one shilling and sixpence. No more than two people could be duped without the trick being known; but strangers would provide a steady clientele . . .

Seeing the Father's eyes fixed on him, Timbela hastily assumed an air of injured innocence and launched into an eloquent denial of any such intention, speaking in his native language of Hausa, which Father O'Flynn understood reasonably well. He longed to ask his mentor the best method of ensuring that the pigeon after sale was not killed for the pot before it had a chance to return to the loft. But the certainty of such a query arousing suspicion was too great.

He could scarcely wait for his dismissal before running off to tell Akela how completely his faith in the White Priest's ingenuity had been justified.

When Timbela got back to the office, Akela had not yet

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returned from his visit to the sacred tree. The Weasel was in his office and called the boy in.

"Where have you been, Timbela? Why did you not await my return?"

"I . . . I was seeking ideas."

"Oh! And did you find them? Listen, little rascal. I have something for you to seek."

The white man glanced shrewdly at the expressive little face beside him and saw his discomfiture.

"That does not please you—you had other plans. What were they?"

Timbela always favoured two principles in action. The first was to be bold, and the second was to tell the truth in preference to a lie. The art of the matter lay in knowing how much of the truth to tell.

His hesitation was scarcely noticeable.

"Methought, oh Lord, that it was time my little pigeon made his first flight. I was taking him to the entrance to the forest, beyond the drink shop of Ambuchi."

"Your little pigeon? Ah, I remember! I said the first-born of the last brood should be your special charge but not your property. Is it well?"

"The best of all," said Timbela enthusiastically. "It is plump. It comes to me when I call, and it feeds from my hand."

"That is good," said the Weasel gravely. "Now, listen. Perhaps it will be well for you to take your bird to Ambuchi's. All visitors to Fulassi gather there. Do you know N'Kongo?"

"A bad man, Lord," said Timbela vehemently. "A very evil man. He went northwards one moon past, for which Allah be praised."

"True, true. But he is on his way back. Do you know him by sight?"

"I would know him at sight, whatever his disguise. He cannot hide from me."

"How can you be so sure?"

"The lobe of his right ear is a peculiar shape. There is a small mole beneath the left eyelid. There are other marks. Moreover, he has tricks, such as stroking his little finger when he talks. I think perchance it is when he lies—which is often."

"That is very good, Timbela. You have learnt the lessons I gave you. But mark the folly of having tricks in our—profession. Have I not told you that your trick of twiddling the toes when you lie will one day bring you to ruin? Now, hearken. It is vital that I should know instantly when N'Kongo returns. Does he visit Ambuchi?"

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"For certain, Lord. Ambuchi is his friend. He goes there for news and to meet his helpers. Even they will not know him. Never is his disguise the same."

"That is true and it distresses the Commissioner. His police will not recognize the man. Much depends on you, Timbela. And yet I fear for you. There may be danger. I would not . . . that . . ."

"Have no fear, Lord," cried Timbela, his spirits soaring at the mission. "If I find him I shall release the pigeon, but only if I find him. When the pigeon re-enters the trap, you will know. Come speedily then, perchance with police."

"Where to? Ambuchi's? Why are you so lazy that you will not learn to write? How can I be sure even that the bird has not escaped, or that it is to Ambuchi I must come? Where else could I find thee? The farther end of the market-place? Wait, we shall use signs. See! Here is the container to slip on the bird's leg and the paper to go inside. It fits exactly. Tear off a strip across the top and it means Ambuchi. Tear off a strip along the side and I come to the market."

"That is good talk, Lord, very good talk. Better than writing. Were I to write, the whole town would gather round and talk of it. I go, Lord. The hour is near when men gather at Ambuchi's. I shall tell Corporal Adamoo to spread his prayer-rug and pray to Allah to speed the bird home. Always does he do so when my Lord releases a bird at a distance, and never has Allah failed: for which Allah be praised."

Ambuchi's courtyard was well filled when Timbela arrived. The proprietor himself, patriarchal and dignified, presided from a stool placed on the raised floor of the open hut, facing the door. He gave no sign of welcome as the boy entered, a sure indication that those were present who must not be alarmed by an acknowledged acquaintance with a myrmidon of the Government.

Timbela, who had slipped in unobtrusively behind a Kintampo cattle-driver from the north, swept the company with his quick eyes and squatted down by a nondescript stranger by the door, with the dust of travel still on him. The boy studied him with a quick side glance and dismissed him as a commonplace tribesman from the forest, his head swathed in a turbanlike cloth whose faded tassels hung over his eyes. The buzz of talk, hushed momentarily by the new arrivals, swelled again.

Most of the company, Timbela noted, were Fulassi townsfolk, railing with some bitterness against the newly established octroi and the consequent rise in the cost of food. There was no stranger, the boy decided, who could be N'Kongo in disguise.

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unless—unless it were the greybeard on his right whose bright, piercing eyes touched a chord of memory.

He could not see the man's ears or detect any mole below the left eye, for his face was suspiciously coated with dust. Timbela felt, however, that he was the most likely one of all those present to be the wanted man.

He cast about for a chance of opening a conversation with him. It came when the greybeard produced from a fold of his clothing a leaf of the local tobacco, rolled it swiftly, and fumbled for a match. Timbela whipped out from the knotted end of his loin-cloth his greatest treasure, a lighter.

Flicking it open and revelling in the gasps of amazement which burst from his neighbours as the flame sparked to life, he held it out towards the old man.

"A light, Father, see! It burns clear. There is no magic. Do not fear."

The boy's conscience pricked him. Had not his Lord and master taught him always that the secret of an agent's work was to be inconspicuous? And now his foolish pride had drawn every eye upon him.

He concealed the lighter again in the knotted end of his loin-cloth, and turned to his neighbour.

"The leaf smells good, Father. It is no Fulassi growth. Hast come far? From the north, perchance?"

The old man peered suspiciously at Timbela. "What does a child such as thou know of the taste of the leaf-that-burns? It soothes the old, but it poisons the young. What has thou there in the cage? A young bird ripe for the pot?"

"For the pot?" Timbela echoed indignantly. "Never! He is as my child. See how he feeds from my hand."

As he opened the basket the pigeon hopped fearlessly onto the boy's wrist and looked up into his face as though asking for the corn that was his due.

Timbela found a few grains in the loin-cloth and held them out in his palm.

"His name is Awuz," he announced proudly, "and he comes when I call."

The stranger on his left leaned forward.

"A plump young bird, well covered. He should cook well and tastily. How much?"

"He is not for sale—nor for eating," he added with a shudder.

"Well, well," said the stranger, "we shall say nothing of eating. He shall sit on my roof and foster peace beneath it. But stay! What is this? What is this? A broken leg? I buy no broken-legged birds."

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He picked the bird off Timbela's wrist so quickly that the boy failed to stop him.

He was relieved to note that the man handled the bird skilfully, holding him over the wings. The stranger examined the metal sleeve on the leg, operated the minute catch, opened it, and drew it away.

"What is this?" he asked suspiciously, examining the paper. "A charm?"

Timbela checked the explanation that rose to his lips and nodded. The stranger fumbled awkwardly with bird and holder, trying to replace the paper.

"It is too large," he grumbled, tearing a strip off the top, and returning the holder to the bird's leg. "Hark, boy. A shilling is sufficient for such a young bird."

He fumbled in his scrip, produced a shilling, tossed it to Timbela, and, in doing so, lost his hold on the bird. It hopped onto Timbela's wrist, pecked at his hand and, finding it empty of corn, rose in flight, circled over the courtyard until the distant loft came into view, and shot off towards it. The man uttered a curse and glanced resentfully at Timbela.

"A trick," he muttered. "The bird was mine, paid for in fair sale."

"The fault was thine," countered Timbela, hastily knotting up the shilling in his cloth and taking out his lighter. "Thou hadst taken delivery. Ownership had already passed. The law is clear."

"What care I for the law?" growled the man. "Return me my shilling or—"

Timbela rose to his feet swiftly and stood poised for flight. "Or what?" he queried, impertinently.

The stranger gazed so slowly round the assembly, as though at a loss to know what to say, that Timbela relaxed his guard.

"Or . . . or . . ." mumbled the man. His hand shot out, gripped the boy's before he could evade his grasp, and squeezed it so excruciatingly that Timbela screamed and dropped the lighter.

"Or," the stranger concluded, calmly picking it up, "I shall take this in lieu. See! I have taken delivery. Ownership has passed. Such is the law."

"No! No! The lighter is not for sale. It is mine—a gift from . . . from . . . a great man who will punish thee . . . for theft and robbery. Give it back! Give it back!"

The stranger glowered at him. "Silence, brat! The lighter is mine. I have spoken."

He rose to his feet and turned to the door.

"Help me, Ambuchi, help me!" cried Timbela frantically.

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"Thou canst not abet robbery. The police will come and bring great trouble. Help!"

Not a man moved.

Timbela felt their icy indifference chilling his spine. The robber was no more than a yard from the door; in a moment he would be gone. Never would his Lord give him another lighter. Maddened with fury, he threw himself on the ground, clasped his arms round the stranger's ankles, and brought him crashing down on the threshold.

Scenting trouble to come, the crowd in the courtyard strove to escape, jammed themselves in the doorway, and sprawled on top of the fallen man. Crushed, buffeted, and breathless though he was, Timbela clung on with all his strength to the legs of his enemy, whose struggles waned under the weight of the bodies lying on top of him.

There the Commissioner and his police, led by the Weasel, found him some minutes later. They had difficulty in inducing him to relax his grip.

"A grand rugby tackle," jested the Commissioner, "brought down on the line. All right, Timbela, let go! We have your friend. Who is he?"

The Weasel bent down suddenly and gazed at the lowering face of the stranger. His head-dress was askew and the lobe of his right ear was uncovered.

"Look! It is N'Kongo himself. Hold him tight. He is as slippery as an eel. Well done, Timbela Moshi! Did I not say he would find him before your police? He found him *and* arrested him. He is worthy of a great reward."

Timbela had had his reward, but said nothing of it. The man had dropped the lighter in the struggle and Timbela had already recovered it.

He stowed it away while he thought up the tale of how he had detected the wanted man and had detained him in the only way he could, until the police should answer the summons to Ambuchi's, carried by Awuz, the pigeon.

It was an easy tale to tell; for it involved few lies—only the suppression of certain facts. It seemed so obvious that Timbela must have torn the paper and dispatched the bird. His listeners heard his tale with enthusiasm, clearly it rang true. Why, then, did his Lord appear so puzzled as they walked back to the office?

The Weasel paused at the foot of the steps. "Tell me, Timbela," he said, looking keenly at the boy. "The man's headgear hid his ear until it was disarranged by his fall. How did you know for sure that he was N'Kongo?"

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"Because," said the boy with the confidence born of an active imagination, "because he stroked his finger when he lied and the lie was an obvious one."

The Weasel looked at Timbela's toes and nodded.

"I see. A foolish trick—as foolish as twiddling your toes as you are doing now. Never mind, imp. I ask no more questions. You have won us both much honour. It may be that your wage will be raised. I shall speak of it later—"

With a soaring heart, Timbela ran off in search of Akela.

* * *

ANSWERS to HIGH SOCIETY
on page 16

1. *Sir Patrick Spens, in the anonymous ballad of that title.*
2. *The White Queen, in "Through the Looking-Glass," by Lewis Carroll.*
3. *The Emperor Jones, in the play of that title by Eugene O'Neill.*
4. *Duke Senior, in "As You Like It," by William Shakespeare.*
5. *Tamburlaine, in Christopher Marlowe's play, "Tamburlaine the Great."*
6. *King Magnus, in "The Apple Cart," by George Bernard Shaw.*
7. *Alice, in "The May Queen," by Alfred Tennyson.*
8. *The King of Laputa, in "Gulliver's Travels," by Jonathan Swift.*

IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

W. R. BURNETT'S
COLOURFUL NEW NOVEL
"CAPTAIN LIGHTFOOT"

*

JOHN STEINBECK
WOLF MANKOWITZ
RAY BRADBURY
EDITH MACWHIRTER

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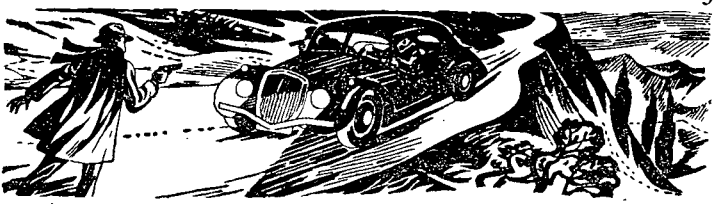

The Third Part of

MARGIN OF TERROR

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Mark Rayburn, a young engineer about to return to the States after two years' work in Italy, finds himself in a mysterious and menacing situation in Rome. He meets a lovely American girl, Amanda Warren, who seems terrified of a foreigner, Marioff, but refuses to admit it, though she is being constantly shadowed. Johnny Dreyk, a renegade American journalist of communist persuasion, fails to return home, and in his absence there is a brutal attack on his little Italian mistress, Maria.

From a hotel manager, Eduardo Ranalli, Mark learns that the "shadow" is a Rumanian by name of Tzara, and from an ex-employee, Umberto, he discovers that Marioff is Vasily Polov, a high-ranking Soviet official entrusted with kidnapping Papa George, an eminent anti-communist who has disappeared.

After the death of Umberto, killed by a shot intended for Mark, and an unsuccessful attempt on Amanda's life, the girl tells Mark her story. Her brother Peter, who had gone to Russia as a youthful convert but has become disillusioned since, is said to be in Rome, and she hopes to find and help him.

Unknown to either, Peter is left to guard Johnny—whose minor part in Marioff's assignment is now over—while Marioff and his henchman Gregor set off to complete their plan.

With Ranalli's help, Mark arranges a trap that is to lead him to Papa George. Back at his hotel, Mark finds Maria waiting in his room; he agrees to let her accompany him. As the Third (and last) Part opens, Amanda is phoning a false message to Tzara. Suddenly, her door opens, the phone is ripped away, and a hand is clamped over her mouth.

AMANDA twisted desperately, trying to jerk free, unable to think or reason, and knowing nothing but the blind panic of terror. Pain shot through her arm as her wrist was forced up high

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between her shoulder-blades, and then she saw Polov standing before her, the phone in his hand, and a thoughtful frown on his broad, impassive face. Someone was behind her, locking her arm with one hand, crushing her mouth with his other. She was pinioned helplessly to the chair.

Polov looked down at her and rubbed a forefinger along his cheek. Then he stared at the phone. After a few seconds he shrugged and spoke into it, tentatively and softly. Then he began to smile. She heard him say, "Paul," but the rest of it was in a language she didn't understand.

Finally Polov glanced at her and held the receiver against his side. "Well, you plan to be trappers, is that it? Your American will follow Tzara. To Papa George. Is that it?" he repeated gently.

The grip on her wrist tightened, and the pain shot from her shoulder to the small of her back in sickening waves. She arched against the torture and tried to scream. But no sound passed the massive hand that covered half her face, and she felt the blinding sting of tears in her eyes.

"No, don't hurt her," Polov said quietly.

He watched without curiosity or compassion until she ceased to struggle, and then he said, "Oh, it was a trap, of course. And not a bad one, I think."

He put the phone to his ear, and spoke rapidly for a few seconds. When he hung up the receiver, he was smiling.

Amanda knew with terrible certainty what Polov had told his man at the Buonaparte: *Lead the American off somewhere, and make sure he doesn't come back* . . . She shook her head desperately, staring at Polov through her tears.

"You understand it, of course," he said. "The trapper finds himself in a trap. You're intelligent. A free, modern American young woman." He glanced at Gregor. "Somehow, in one way or another, our ends must be attained. I knew we must come here to silence this girl—and doing that has given us the means to silence the American."

He smiled again, but there was no humour in his eyes. "Does this bore you?" he asked her gently.

Gregor stared down at Amanda, then looked up at Polov.

"No, not here," Polov said, at last. "There has been too much here already . . ."

Gusts of wind bent the palm trees in front of the dark bulk of the Embassy, and stirred cigarette-stubs and brightly coloured lottery tickets in the gutter. The streets were empty and cold.

Mark checked his watch; five minutes ago she had made the call. He watched the entrance to the Buonaparte, his nerves tightening. The acrid tang of the driver's cheap cigarette, the feel of Maria's shoulder against his arm, the pool of light on the pavement in front of the Buonaparte, all this pressed clamorously at his senses. He was like an insomniac, helplessly aware

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of every creak in the house, every wrinkle in the bed. "What are we waiting for?" Maria asked petulantly; she wasn't used to being ignored.

He didn't answer her, and she said, "Oh, all right!"

The revolving door of the Buonaparte began to turn. Light splintered off its brass fittings, and then Paul Tzara hurried out to the pavement.

"Attenzione, adesso," Mark said sharply to the driver. The man nodded, flipped his cigarette out of the window, and turned the ignition key.

Tzara looked up and down the dark street, obviously agitated. He had a muffler in one hand, and he began to wind it around his throat as he turned and ran clumsily down the curving incline that led into the Piazza Barberini. Mark's driver started his engine and moved out slowly from the kerb.

Tzara passed half a dozen parked cars before stopping at a tiny Renault and unlocking its front door, got in, and started to drive down the hill.

Mark's driver followed him, keeping an interval of about fifty yards between the two cars. The Renault, a four-cylinder model with a turtle-shaped top, chattered into the Piazza Barberini and bore north in the direction of the Via Flaminia.

A few cars and trucks shared the road with them now, and Mark hoped they would keep Tzara from noticing that he was being followed. But he didn't seem suspicious; he drove out to the Ponte Flaminia, turned left, and crossed the Tiber, keeping between thirty-five and forty kilometres an hour.

He took the Florence road, increasing his speed to about fifty. A thin edge of light cut the darkness at the horizon, and occasional heavy transport trucks lumbered by them on the way to Rome. Then, as a range of low hills rose on their right, Tzara's tail-light gleamed red and he slowed for a stop.

Mark told the driver to go on for another hundred yards. He glanced out as they passed the parked Renault, and saw Tzara lumbering towards a petrol station beside the road. The station was closed at this hour, and Tzara went round it and disappeared in the blackness at the foot of a hill.

Mark knew this area. Several hundred Italians lived here in these hills, in caves without heat, light, or plumbing. They had put in floors, doors, even chimneys in some cases, and got along as best they could; some were waiting for a chance to move in with relatives in the city, and others were waiting for nothing at all. Tourists drove out here in good weather to see the caves. They usually waved to the people who were cheerful enough, took their pictures, and then went back to Rome and ate their dinners without much appetite.

That had happened to Mark two years ago, on his first and only trip to the caves. Now he told the driver to stop and turn off his lights.

He was suddenly excited; for the first time tonight his hopes

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did not seem preposterous. This was a perfect and logical place for Polov to hold Papa George. The old man would undoubtedly be drugged, and this tiny village of anonymous misery would ask no questions about one more helpless derelict. But he must make sure that Papa George was here, and then get word to the Embassy. He left the car and walked through the darkness towards the petrol station. When Tzara's little Renault loomed up ahead of him he stopped in the heavy shadow of a tree.

The hill rose above him, softly rounded against the sky, and in the thin light of dawn he saw the crude wooden doors of the caves. From behind the petrol station a crooked lane cut through thin stacks of logs towards the mountain; that's where Tzara had gone, into the road that led around the base of the hill.

Mark hesitated, feeling the vast silence echoing on all sides of him. Then he heard a clatter of light footsteps and looked over his shoulder. Maria was picking her way towards him, the cheap little stole pulled tightly about her shoulders against the wind, her face a soft small blur in the darkness. She stopped close to him, and put a hand on his arm as her high heels teetered on the rutted ground.

"Go back to the cab," he said.

"You want that man we followed?"

"I want to know where he's gone, that's all."

"Let me do it, let me help you," she said, tightening her grip on his arm.

"Damn it, get back to the cab."

"But I am Italian. I speak Italian. If I am seen, it is all right. Don't you understand that, you big American? They will shoot you and kill you, but me they will not think a thing about."

Mark frowned. There was sound sense in her argument.

"Oh, you are a fool!" she cried. "Does it matter who does it, so long as it is done?"

Mark took hold of her arm and pointed to the road, which was a pale slash through the blackness of the timber. "All right," he said quietly. "You see that lane? Follow it and find out where it leads. Don't do anything else. Come back to the cab. I'll wait for you there."

"Yes, yes," she said, and pulled impatiently against his grip on her arm.

"One minute. What will you say if you meet someone?"

"I shall tell them," she said, shaking her fingers irritably at the question, "that I meet my poor, hungry lover here in the caves."

He released her arm, and she walked quickly towards the road that led around the hill.

For an instant she was caught in a shaft of grey light, and he saw the silver flash of her legs, the tilt of her arrogant little head with its boyish crop of bronze-coloured hair, and then she was gone —up the hill after Tzara.

Mark walked back to the cab and watched the line of light widening at the horizon, trying to keep his anxiety in check. The

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fields and hills were touched with the soft grey-purple of dawn now, and a high, cold wind was racing through the trees. Inside the cab the driver smoked cigarettes and occasionally glanced with sleepy satisfaction at his ticking meter.

Mark could see Tzara's Renault in the hazy light, and the wooden shack of the petrol station and the hill. Nothing moved in the early-morning silence.

Suddenly he threw aside a tasteless cigarette, and started back towards the Renault. He'd been a fool to trust the girl. Why should she be honest with him? Everything in her conditioning would make her play along with Johnny's friends. He stopped, worried now and bitterly angry with himself; everything might have been ruined by his stupid faith in her tears. Turning, he ran back to the cab and paid off the driver. The man shrugged, finding no sense in any of this, backed his car about, and clattered off in the direction of Rome. Mark waited until he was out of sight, then crossed a ditch and a barbed-wire fence, and started across a field that would take him round behind the entrance to the road.

He walked about a hundred yards before turning right and bearing for the stack of timber that flanked the road. Entering the woods, he left the misty light behind him; among the trees it was almost completely dark. After thirty or forty yards he was at the narrow lane; there was no one in sight, and the silence was disturbed only by the far-off chattering of a bird. He went to his left, moving cautiously, following the curving path around the hill. A few moments later he came to a clearing where the road ended. There was a saw-horse in the clearing and the ground was covered with sawdust and wood chips. The lane was simply a passage for woodmen who came here to cut up logs.

Tzara hadn't been going in this direction. Mark stood quietly for a moment, breathing deeply, listening to the silence. Where had Tzara gone? And Maria? He thought he could guess the answers to those questions. Moving silently, he went back along the road, following it round the hill and down towards the petrol station. When he was near the entrance to the lane, he stepped back into the timber and worked his way through the stacks for another six or eight yards.

It was still quite dark, but now he could see the main highway ahead of him and Tzara's parked Renault. Then he moved forward another few feet and saw Tzara himself, standing in the shadow of a tree at the entrance to the narrow lane. Tzara was watching the highway, a gun in his right hand. He hadn't followed the road up the hill; he'd waited here for anyone foolish enough to come after him. Mark inched through the stacks of timber towards the road, feeling only a numb and hopeless rage. Why hadn't he seen it? Tzara's agitation as he came out of his hotel had been too pat, too histrionic. And he'd led them out here like a mechanical rabbit drawing a pack of hounds.

Mark stepped into the road, the Luger in his hand. "Put the gun down," he said softly.

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He heard a sudden harsh intake of breath. Then Tzara said, "I have put it down."

"Turn round. Where's the girl?"

"What girl?" Tzara faced him, a big, awkward figure in the semi-darkness.

"The one who came in here. Where is she? We'll get to Papa George next. Where's the girl?"

"I know nothing about a girl," Tzara said. Something gleamed on the ground and pulled Mark's eyes to it for a split second. In the trees on the opposite side of the lane a pearl-white splinter of light glanced off a narrow sandal, a slender silken ankle.

The stillness of that small foot told him what had happened to Maria.

Mark switched his eyes back to Tzara, saw he was bringing up his gun slowly, and he was suddenly and viciously glad that Tzara was going to shoot. "Take it," he said, and fired twice at the middle of Tzara's big, bulky body.

The Luger kicked solidly against the heel of his palm, and Tzara took two steps towards him, bending slightly at the waist and raising his gun as he advanced. His breath was very loud, but he seemed to be smiling; his lips were drawn back flat, exposing his teeth, and his face was wrinkled like a wadded-up piece of waste paper.

Mark fired again and Tzara twisted sideways, bending sharply now, and his gun exploded into the ground. He fell limply, disjointedly, like a big sack of rags rolling over on its side. There was no longer the illusion of a smile on his face; he looked surprised and slightly stupid. That was all.

Putting the gun in his pocket, Mark went across the lane and knelt beside Maria. She lay on her back, her arms and legs sprawling like those of a broken doll. He knew she was dead, even before he saw the ghastly purple bruises on her throat and the wild staring look of her eyes. She wasn't pretty any more—she wasn't anything. The exquisitely sculptured little head was like the relief on an old Roman coin; distant, cold, remote.

He held one of her hands for a moment, squeezing it tightly. After a while he covered her face with the cheap, imitation-fur stole and got to his feet, dazed and shaken. He walked slowly down to Tzara's Renault, his knees trembling weakly. The implications of the trap were so plain that he didn't see them for a moment. Then, as he came out behind the petrol station, he suddenly realized the truth: Polov had known he was going to follow Tzara, and he could only have got that information *from Amanda*.

He stopped still, feeling the lurch of his heart, and then he ran down the hill to the Renault, and got in behind the wheel. The keys were in the ignition, and he started the engine, turned the car round, and headed for Rome, pushing the accelerator tight against the floorboard. He tried not to think of her, or of anything, but one thought twisted through his defences and forced itself into his mind; he knew in his heart that he was already too late.

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When he came to the Via Flaminia, he parked and went into a café. The place was small and warm, and smelt of cigarettes, coffee, sugary buns, and doughnuts. Three or four men, labourers with early jobs at the gas company or post office, stood drinking strong espresso coffee from tiny white cups. A soldier of the Bersaglieri was sleeping at a corner table. His cap was on the seat beside him, and its plume of black feathers trailed over the edge.

Mark bought a phone counter from the proprietor, and put through a call to the Hotel Wilson. The desk clerk answered in a few seconds.

"Amanda Warren," Mark said sharply. "This is urgent."

"Oh, she has left, signore."

Mark's fist tightened on the receiver. "Was she alone?"

"No, signore. She was accompanied by two gentlemen."

"What did they look like?"

"They were large gentlemen, signore. One of them wore glasses, I believe. They were in black clothes—"

"You fool!" Mark yelled. "Why didn't you stop them?"

"We do not stop our guests, signore," the clerk said coldly.

The soldier from the Bersaglieri woke up and looked irritably at Mark. He shrugged, made a tiny gesture with his fingers, folded his arms, and went back to sleep.

Mark stared at the phone, trying to think; she'd been taken away, of course, by Polov and Gregor. What in the name of heaven did he do now? There was only one chance left: Johnny Dreyk. He put the phone back on its hook and ran out to the car. Johnny had been with Polov three days, he was part of the outfit. Now Johnny would talk. He'd get one more chance. Only one.

Maids were cleaning the lobby of the Ariosto when Mark came in, and a tired desk clerk was copying registrations into a leather-bound file. The clerk turned to take down his key, but Mark said, "Never mind that. Is Johnny Dreyk in his room?"

"No, signore. He left not twenty minutes ago."

"Where? Where did he go?"

The clerk shrugged. "He did not say, signore."

"How about Marioff? Is anyone in his room?"

"No, they are all gone. They have given up the room."

Mark turned away from the desk. He felt a hideous, weakening fear going through him; there was no one to turn to, nowhere to go, nothing to do. They had vanished, slipped through his fingers like quicksilver. He was as helpless as a man trying to catch a whiff of smoke in a net.

There was no commissionaire at this hour, no attendants. Mark went outside into the pale, soft dawn. He walked across the empty Via Veneto to the taxi rank, and woke up the driver of the first cab in the line. The man cranked down the window, yawning enormously. Mark asked him if he had seen an American take a cab from the Ariosto in the past half-hour. The driver wasn't sure; he scratched his head, still yawning, and then climbed out and stamped his cold feet on the ground.

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Two or three men from other cabs joined him, and they talked the matter over, excited and interested, occasionally grinning at Mark. One of them thought Ruffo had taken *gli americani*. Ruffo was away sick with the grippe, someone said. No, it was his back, another said hotly. Mark listened to them, trying to control his impatience. He gave them all some money. "Tell Ruffo when he comes back that I want to talk to him," he said. "I'll be in the lobby of the Ariosto. This is important."

They all nodded and assured him they would send Ruffo over instantly, and Mark re-crossed the street and went into the hotel.

Now he had to do what he should have done in the first place: inform the Embassy. If it were too late to save her, he knew he'd carry this burden of guilt the rest of his life.

Simpson, one of the Embassy staff, was a casual friend of Mark's; they had worked together in checking the backgrounds of men employed by Mark's company. He was a deceptively frank and lazy person, and one of the shrewdest men in Europe. Mark looked him up in the phone book and rang his home.

A servant answered and with vast reluctance agreed to wake his master. A little later Simpson came on the other end of the line. "What's up?" he asked. "I thought we'd seen the last of you for a bit."

"Please listen carefully," Mark said. "This is trouble."

When he finished, Simpson said, "Now, see here, are you sure that girl was kidnapped?"

"I'm certain of it."

"All right. I'll get onto that now. But about this Polov business: rumours are flighty things, as you know. Papa George has been rumoured to be in Italy, I'll tell you frankly. But he's also rumoured to be in Scandinavia, Nova Scotia, and Broad Corners, Nebraska. What are your plans for the moment, by the way?" Something had changed in his voice; it was even more casual now.

"I'm turning in for some sleep," Mark said. He knew Simpson was going straight to work on the Polov angle and wanted him to keep out of it.

"Well, that's a sensible idea," Simpson said. "I'll talk over this Polov matter with my chief. All right?"

"Yes, that's fine. And thanks."

When Mark came out of the phone booth, a big man in a frayed overcoat approached him, smiling tentatively. "Ruffo," he said, with an awkward little bob of his head.

"Where did you take the American?" Mark said.

Ruffo smiled and spread his hands.

Mark repeated the question in his slow Italian, and Ruffo beamed, and gave him an address near the Piazza Argentina.

Johnny's apartment, Mark thought.

"I take you there, mister?" Ruffo said, smiling.

"No, I've got a car." Mark's fingers trembled as he gave Ruffo a five-thousand-lira note. There was still a chance.

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Mark spurred the little car on through the pink-and-grey emptiness of the city, and parked before the black heap of Johnny's palazzo. He took the stairs up to the apartment; he didn't want to advertise his presence with the whine of the lift. On Johnny's landing he paused a few seconds, breathing hard. Then he rapped sharply on the door.

There was a stir inside the apartment, and Johnny's voice sounded, low and cautious: "Yes, who is it?"

"Mark. Open up!"

"What do you want?"

"Open up, or I'll kick my way in," Mark said.

"All right, hold on."

After a few seconds, Johnny opened the door. Mark put a hand against his chest and shoved him back into the room.

"What's the idea?" Johnny said, in a high, shrill voice. His thin face was pale and his lips were trembling.

"Where's Polov?" Mark said. "No more stalling, no more chatter, Johnny! Where's Polov?"

The door clicked shut, and a voice behind him said softly, "Keep your hands away from your sides. Don't turn around."

"You fool, you poor, stupid fool," Johnny said, and began to laugh.

A hard object pressed into Mark's back. "Steady, now," the soft voice said. The Luger was drawn out from his overcoat pocket, and a hand brushed his other pockets with expert speed. Then the man came round in front of him, smiling slightly. He put the Luger in his pocket and covered Mark with a gun, which had a silencer attached to the barrel.

Mark remembered what one of the cab-drivers at the Ariosto had said: "*gli americani.*" The plural form. There had been more than one. Why hadn't he caught that, he thought numbly.

"You're the troublesome American, eh?" the man with the gun said, still smiling faintly. "The Quixotic thorn in the side of our little team."

Mark studied the man's lean, weary features, his thinning grey hair and cold, empty eyes. He was English or American, obviously, but his baggy tweeds and ascetic features were at grotesque variance with the gun in his hand.

"I want to know where Polov is," Mark said.

"Well, we can't tell you that, of course," the man said.

"You'll have to use that gun to keep me here."

"I shouldn't mind." His voice was pleasant, his manner rather bored, but Mark knew with cold conviction that he'd shoot him without a second thought.

"Now you've come full circle," Johnny said, and through the mockery of his voice there was a triumphant ring of vindication. "What was the use of all your pious morality? You didn't like what was going on, you thought it was just a wicked shame, but what were you able to do about it?"

He came a step closer to Mark, his eyes bright with anger and

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scorn. "I'll tell you. Nothing—that's what you accomplished. You wanted to be a hero. You wanted to run for a touchdown while thousands shouted your praises. Now it's over. If you make another move, Peter will put a bullet through your head. That's the net result of your elephantiasis of conscience, and yet you had the nerve to patronize me, to call me a weakling and a fool. It's not tragic, it's just damned hilarious."

"You are a fool," Mark said. "Only a fool would pay the price you've paid for a little keyhole spying on a bunch of hoodlums."

"That's typical—"

"Oh, shut up," Mark said wearily. He looked at the man who held the gun, studying again the sensitive features, the lacklustre, defeated eyes. "Your name is Peter?"

"Yes, that's right."

It was hardly possible, Mark thought. Amanda's brother was in his twenties, and this man looked forty or more. But with a feeling close to despair, he knew his guess was right. "You're Amanda Warren's brother," he said slowly. "She's been here in Rome, looking for you."

"Of course. That's what caused this confusion. She recognized Polov. I kept out of sight and hoped she'd behave sensibly."

"Polov has her now," Mark said.

"Well, that's a pity," Peter said. "But it needn't have happened, you know. You do realize that, of course," he said, pointedly. "It was your interference that made all this necessary."

"You don't know what you're saying," Mark retorted. He tried to keep himself under control, but his voice was rising sharply. "You're talking about your sister, not some factor in an equation."

"I don't quite see the distinction."

"You don't mean that," Mark said slowly.

Peter shrugged. "If it pleases you to detect a heart of gold beneath this exterior, then by all means do so."

"She thought you'd got some sense. One of your letters from Russia gave her that idea."

"Well, it's a curious thing, but there are states of enchantment and disenchantment in my life," Peter said. "I obviously wrote her in one of the latter moods."

"And now you're enchanted again?"

"There's no point in talking about it, you wouldn't understand," Peter said. He smiled but no humour touched his empty, defeated eyes. "One moves from one state to another, saying to oneself, 'Now it is good, now it isn't.' After a time you forget just where you are, and then everything seems the same. In this hiatus there's a certain comfort. Freedom from self-analysis is probably one of heaven's higher rewards."

Johnny laughed in a high, excited voice. "How could you possibly understand what he means?" He lit a cigarette, and blew a thin stream of smoke towards the ceiling. "The price you pay for being inquisitive is a high one. You're paying with the exposure of your truly invincible stupidity."

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Mark looked at him steadily. " Your price is stiff, too. Maria's dead, Johnny. That's what you've paid."

Johnny took the cigarette from his mouth and tried to laugh. He blinked his eyes rapidly and shook his head. " No! That's not true," he said. " That's your idea—" He stopped, staring into Mark's cold eyes, and suddenly the smile on his lips became fixed and ghastly.

" You're lying," he said, in a pleading voice.

" Do you think so? " Mark said. He felt sick now, drained of those things which had made sense of his life; pity, compassion, mercy. There was nothing left in him but the ugly satisfaction he took from the helpless pain in Johnny's face. " She's dead, all right," he said coldly. " She was strangled by one of Polov's men. She's dead because she loved you. She was the only person who ever did, I suppose. Is that why she meant something to you? "

Johnny put the cigarette back into his mouth and pushed a tangled lock of hair from his forehead. He tried desperately to pull himself together, to find the props that had sustained him all his life. The comfortable words, the symbols that had dissociated him from consequences, sounded in his mind, but now they seemed the keening gibberish of a madman.

I didn't do it, he told himself, moving his lips stiffly, forcing the useless thoughts into his consciousness. *They* did it and I couldn't stop them, couldn't fight against that force. I'm all right. I'm safe. Nothing happened to me. I—

He began to weep because he was hurt and he knew that the wound penetrated deep. The thing he had scorned in life—and had needed most desperately—had come to him only once; Maria had loved him, and now she was dead.

He started towards the door, moving with the blind preoccupation of a sleep-walker, and Peter said sharply, " All right, hold it right there."

But Johnny kept walking, rubbing a trembling hand over his forehead. He passed between Mark and Peter, and in that instant, when the gun wasn't on him, Mark hurled Johnny violently against Amanda's brother. Then he ducked and charged forward, driving over Johnny's sprawling body, and slamming his shoulder into Peter's thighs.

They went down together, tangled in Johnny's legs; Peter fell on his back, his breath coming in a gasp, and Mark scrambled on top of him and caught his gun hand, at the wrist. He twisted it powerfully inward, turning the gun away from himself.

There was an instant when the blue hole of the muzzle pointed straight at Mark's forehead. Then Peter's wrist bent easily, slackly, and the gun turned into his stomach. The muffled report seemed anticlimactic; the true end had come before that, in the obliging turn of the wrist. Peter's head went back, and his lips tightened against his teeth. There was pain, but no surprise in his face; it was as if the pain was something he had been expecting for a long time. He began to breathe harshly and rapidly.

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Mark pulled the gun from his hand. "You might have shot me," he said, shaking his shoulder. "Why didn't you?"

"What does it matter?"

"Damn it, tell me."

Mark had to know this, and he used the words as weapons, trying to drive them into Peter's fading consciousness.

"I was too tired," Peter said slowly. His eyes, cold and empty, met Mark's. "That's all. Don't read too much into it, please."

Mark got to his feet a few seconds later and wetted his dry lips. He felt unclean and diseased, as if he'd lived with violence and death for a lifetime.

"Where's Polov?" he asked Johnny softly. "Where did he take her?"

"So you're going to be a hero," Johnny said, smiling queerly and brightly. "Avenge the world's wrongs, and tilt at a thousand windmills."

"Where is he, Johnny?" Mark said, drawing a deep breath. "You're going to talk. You're going to come with me. You're going to do what I tell you. Do that and you'll live."

"What difference does that make?" Johnny said. He slumped against the wall, still smiling queerly. "Live or die, what difference? He's taken her to La Spezia. Somewhere near there. I heard them telephoning. That's where Papa George is. I made a note of the phone number, too. Everything is useful to a man like me."

Mark bent and retrieved his gun from Peter's coat-pocket. Then he looked at Johnny.

"Get your coat," he said. His voice was soft and quiet in the stillness of the room. "We're going after Polov. Don't talk any more. Don't make me kill you too."

Johnny backed away from the expression in his face, his lips trembling uncontrollably. He looked about the room, his eyes shifting from one object to another; then he nodded jerkily, went to a closet, and took out a hat and coat. Mark opened the door.

They drove into a rainstorm an hour north of Rome. Mark swore as he flipped on the windscreen-wipers. He had been making good time in Tzara's Renault, but this would slow him down. It was now six o'clock.

The sun had come up a few moments before, brightening the dusty brown farm lands, and glinting with sharp brilliance on the purple and red sides of the mountains. But it was under banks of low cloud now, and the countryside had gone into one colour, a muddy, cheerless grey. There was no traffic as yet, and the rain came down straight and hard, sending up white spray as it struck the black road.

Johnny sat beside him, his shoulders hunched against the cold, a cigarette hanging from his lips. The ash dribbled down the front of his overcoat with the bouncing of the car.

"What were Polov's plans for Papa George?" Mark asked.

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"He didn't discuss them with me," Johnny said. "They closed the door between our rooms when they talked."

"How about the keyhole?"

Johnny's lips trembled. "You never miss a chance, do you? Sure, I was at the keyhole. That's my type."

"What did you find out?" Mark asked coldly.

"They planned to take Papa George to a fishing village on the Adriatic. Recanati, I think. A Greek fisherman was going to pick them up and take them to Athens. But that fell through. The Greek backed out. The other plan was to motor up through Switzerland into Germany. But they needed papers for Papa George, and that's what they were waiting for."

"What next?"

"I don't know," Johnny said. "But Polov isn't through. He'll walk to Moscow, with Papa George on his back, if he has to. And he'll get away with it."

"Sure, he's wonderful," Mark said drily.

They came to La Spezia, a cold, drab port town, at one o'clock in the afternoon. Rain was still falling; the people in the streets and the pedlars hunched in horse-carts looked pinched and miserable. The tone of the city would change dramatically when the sun appeared, Mark knew; the pavement cafés would fill with leisurely groups, and the children would be hopping through the streets like shrill, piping birds.

Mark stopped at the first good-sized hotel, the Reale, and with Johnny beside him, entered the large, draughty lobby. He ordered sandwiches, coffee, and brandy for both of them, and then looked up the manager, who was a paunchy little man with thinning black hair and lively, good-humoured eyes. Mark asked him if he could find the address to which a certain phone number had been issued. The manager suggested that the simplest way would be to telephone and ask whoever answered for the address, but Mark told him that was impossible. He offered no explanation and the manager, looking puzzled now, said he would do his best.

Mark gave him the number Johnny had overheard Polov using, and then went into the dining-room. He ate without removing his overcoat; this and the business of the telephone number, he knew, would blaze their trail to the police. When Peter's body was discovered, and Ruffo, the cab-driver, came forward, the police would be after Mark. And Simpson would be after him, too. When they got this far, the manager would send them on—to Polov.

He poured his brandy into the hot, sweet coffee, and drank it down. The warmth of it went through him, cutting the chill and fatigue of his body. Then he left money on the table, and went into the lobby.

The manager met him, smiling confidently. "I have called the telephone exchange," he said. "I shall have the information presently now."

"All right," Mark said. He lit a cigarette, feeling nothing but impatience and anger and, underneath that, two fears: the fear

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that he would never see Amanda again, and the fear of telling her about her brother. But the first fear was the bad one.

There was a call at the desk for the manager, and when he came back, he said, "This is a farm you want, on the road to Parma. It is about fifty kilometres from here."

"How can I find it?" Mark asked.

"I do not know of it myself, but I shall ask one of our employees whose family lives in that area. Excuse me, please."

The manager brought back a young waiter with glossy hair and soft, rather anxious eyes. "Cicco will tell us," he said. "I shall translate for you."

The waiter and the manager conferred for a moment.

"Now, it is like this," he said. "You go back on the road to Rome. About fifteen kilometres from here you will see the signs pointing towards Parma. You follow that road for thirty-two, thirty-four kilometres. Then you pass a small trattoria or inn on the left, eh? It is the only place in that stretch of road—Cicco says, you understand. Now you continue on. The farm you seek is also on the left, ten, maybe twelve kilometres beyond the trattoria. It is owned by a man named Vorno. He has lived there maybe six years. Now, you have all that? I shall write it down, eh?"

"No, I can remember," Mark said. "Thanks."

They went out to the Renault and headed back towards Rome. The rain had stopped, but the day was grey and overcast; it would be dark by half past four, Mark thought. Now it was almost two.

"What are you going to do?" Johnny asked.

"I don't know."

"You won't do much alone."

"Shut up, damn it."

Some twenty minutes later, Mark turned onto the Parma road, travelling inland now towards the foot-hills of the Appenines. The mountains loomed before them, black, with snowy peaks against a darkening sky. Mark had often driven on these mountain roads, travelling up the spiky back of Italy to Milan. He had liked these mountains with the roads clinging to their sides, and the cosy little alberghi sheltered from the wind at their peaks.

Now, as the road began to twist and climb, he hated it all, the hairpin turns, the gloomy, settling darkness, and the wind that came across the flat stretches and battered the sides of the car. It ate away time, and time was his only ally.

His speed dropped from sixty to fifty and settled at a chugging forty-five, as they climbed round the mountain. Now he could feel the sharper bite of the wind that whistled in at the edge of the doors; it was colder and darker with every passing kilometre. He turned on the lights and their thin yellow beams bored weakly into the gloom.

They dipped into a plateau and the road straightened out, the turns became more gradual.

They had come twenty-five kilometres now, and Mark began watching on his left, praying that the waiter hadn't made up the

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information for courtesy's sake. He was driving as fast as possible, looking out for turns, and the occasional farm boys, driving mules along the road, when he saw it—a tiny trattoria with a petrol-pump in front of it, set well back from the highway and unmarked by signs. Its single lighted window winked quickly at him and disappeared behind in the closing darkness.

Unconsciously, he had tightened his grip on the wheel; now he relaxed slightly and felt the tension easing in his muscles. So far they were all right. "That was it," he said. "It's just another ten or twelve kilometres."

Johnny nodded and a piece of ash tumbled down on his overcoat. He stared out of his window. "Did you have a chance to talk to her?" he said, in a tight, pinched voice.

"Maria? Not very much."

"Did she—did she say anything about me?"

I don't owe him one damn thing, Mark thought bitterly. He wants his conscience put to rest or his ego flattered, but he's come to the wrong person. However, against his will, he responded to the need in Johnny's voice. "She told me she loved you," he said. "Does that make you feel better?"

"Why did she do it? What was she trying to prove?" Johnny said, taking the cigarette from his lips and throwing it on the floor of the car.

"I don't know. She had courage."

"Courage, courage," Johnny cried. "Why do people think that's so important?"

"I don't know. They do, that's all."

"They're fools. They don't admire courage, they admire bullies with tough faces and truncheons. That's what they mistake for courage."

Mark watched the countryside to his left. They were almost a mile past the place where the waiter had told them they would come on Vorno's farm.

"I hope he knew what he was talking about," he muttered.

"Italians supply answers, not information," Johnny said and laughed shortly. "You should know that by now."

They had to be right, Mark thought, and his hands tightened again on the wheel. There wasn't time to be wrong. Not again . . .

He turned with the road, hugging the mountainside, and when he straightened out he saw a streamer of black smoke rising on his left, an indistinct smudge against the sky. It was about a quarter of a mile off. The road dipped, levelling out, and as they swept down to lower ground he saw the farmhouse standing in squat, ugly relief against a black-grey field.

They went past a lane that turned into the farmhouse, their engine chattering powerfully with the downhill speed, and then the house disappeared behind them as they rounded another curve. Mark slowed down to stop.

"Did you see anything?" he asked.

"Just smoke. And a car in the yard. Someone's there."

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Mark cut off the engine, and the silence came down around them heavily, abruptly.

"Well, what are you going to do?" Johnny said.

"Stop asking me that," Mark said, sharply. "Get out, we'll take a look."

They left the car and followed the road back towards the farmhouse. When they came in sight of it, Mark climbed down into a gully that flanked the field and told Johnny to follow him. Mark waded forward, his shoes sucking in the mud, until he was within thirty yards of the house. Johnny slogged up beside him.

The house was a heavy mass in the darkness. Smoke came from one of two chimneys, and there was a light shining from a ground-floor window.

From the field beside them a wood hen rose with drumming wings, and Johnny let out a small, choked cry of terror. The bird flew off in a wide circle and the enormous silence settled back on them with an almost palpable weight.

Mark watched the farmhouse, turning plans in his mind; but he knew with hopeless certainty that no plan was any good as long as it was just himself against Polov and his men. He knew also that he couldn't wait much longer; time was with him now, but when Polov made his move, that advantage would be gone.

Then he heard the iron sound of a bolt being drawn back. He crouched low, pulling Johnny down beside him, as the front door of the house opened and a rectangular bar of light fell onto the ground. A man with a pail stepped outside. From his height and shoulders Mark recognized him as Gregor.

That meant that Polov was probably there; he and Gregor had left Rome together, with Amanda. It didn't mean that she was there, of course. They might have got rid of her by now. He forced himself to think coldly, trying to ignore his fears. There were at least three men, then: Polov, Gregor, and the farmer, Vorno.

Gregor threw out the contents of the pail and went into the house. When the door closed behind him, Mark tapped Johnny on the arm and started back to the car. After fifteen or twenty yards, he climbed out of the gully. He pulled Johnny up beside him, and said quietly, "Don't talk. Let's go. Fast."

They walked down the road, their muddy shoes slippery on the surface, and when they rounded the bend, Mark said, "Come on!" and began to run.

He started the car, turned it, and drove back the way they had come, passing Vorno's farmhouse and heading in the direction of La Spezia.

"What are you going to do?" Johnny asked, in a high, nervous voice.

"Shut up," Mark said. He was trying to keep his thoughts straight, to make sure that he wasn't blundering into another mistake. Everything else he pushed out of his mind; the black, twisting road, the cold wind hammering at the car, the fear that he

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might be too late to save her—all this he drove from his mind. Now there was only room for Polov. He had to trick that cold, prescient, impassive man, and there was no margin for even the smallest miscalculation.

Polov thought he was safe now. He had taken care of Amanda, and would assume that Mark had been eliminated by Tzara. The only other person who knew who he was and could cause him trouble was Johnny. And Johnny, Polov now believed, was in Rome, safely in Peter's custody.

Mark turned to Johnny, " Listen to me. We're going to stop at the trattoria ahead, and you're going to put in a call to Polov. Tell him you're in La Spezia, at the Hotel Reale. Tell him—"

" What—"

" Shut up, Johnny," Mark said, in a low, hard voice. " All you do is listen. You tell Polov you want money. Tell him that if he doesn't meet you in La Spezia for a pay-off that you'll spill everything you know about him to the British, American, and Italian Embassies."

" He won't buy that. Do you think he's a fool? "

" He's got to buy it," Mark said. " He can't risk everything blowing up in his face now. He'll come to La Spezia. With Gregor. He's got to make sure that you don't talk—ever."

They drove in silence for several minutes. Then Johnny said, " And when they go to La Spezia, we go back to the farm. Is that it? "

" What the hell do you think? "

" I can't do it," Johnny said, and his voice was suddenly high and wild. He caught Mark's arm with both hands. " I can't do it, you hear? "

Mark shook his hands off with a savage wrench of his arm. " You'll do it," he said. " Just remember that. *You'll do it.*"

Five minutes later he came to the single yellow light shining from the window of the trattoria. He slowed down and stopped a few feet beyond the petrol-pump. In the sudden dark silence he could hear the sounds of thin violin music and a man's drunken laugh.

" Out," Mark said.

When he came round the front of the car, Johnny was waiting for him, rubbing his hands together, his face a thin, anxious blur in the darkness.

" I meant I couldn't do it," he said, and now there was a desperate, pleading note in his voice.

Mark said softly, " Understand, Johnny. Polov can't hurt you over the phone, and I'm right here. I'll be at your side when you phone. Now, let's go."

The trattoria was the restaurant, bar, and meeting-place for the farmers of the area. A half-dozen of them, sturdy, red-faced men in black woollen suits and mud-caked boots, sat puffing their pipes at wooden tables with flasks of wine before them, and listening to a frail, bearded old man who was playing a violin. The room was

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warm, and smelt of strong tobacco, garlic, and stewed tomatoes. Everyone stared at Mark and Johnny, and the violinist stopped playing and took a drink from a glass of wine at his elbow.

The proprietor, a big, smiling man, came round the bar and bowed awkwardly to them. Mark told him they wanted to telephone, and he escorted them ceremoniously through a passage to a back room, and pointed out the phone on the wall. He gave Mark a counter to use and bowed himself out, still smiling.

The music began again, thin and lively and remote. Mark looked at Johnny and nodded towards the phone.

"All right," Johnny said quietly. The room was damp and cold, but there was perspiration on his forehead. His thin face was very pale. He placed the call in rapid, fluent Italian, and then rubbed his mouth roughly with the back of his hand.

There were baskets of potatoes and apples on the floor of the room, and a few farming implements, scythes, hoes, rakes, all of them nicked and rusty, were stacked in a corner. There was a curious smell to the place, a mixture of cold and clay, fruit and dried-out wood.

Mark took the gun from his pocket, thinking nervously and irrelevantly that a number of physical things would never be the same for him again; certainly not apples nor violin music nor the smell of cold clay. They had twisted themselves for ever into this pattern of fear.

Johnny cleared his throat suddenly. "Polov, is that you?" he said, in a ragged voice.

Mark moved closer to him, and heard Polov answer, "Yes, of course. Where are you?"

"La Spezia."

"Ah, you are restless, you travel. And Peter?"

Johnny wet his lips. "Now, listen to me," he said in a desperately hard voice. "I'm at the Reale. In the lobby. I seem to remember that you talked a lot about the advantages I could expect as a result of our relationship. The prospect you painted was bright as a mirage, but equally non-existent, if you follow me."

"I do not understand."

Johnny laughed softly. He was in control of himself now; his voice was strong and steady: "Very well, I'll explain," he said. "I'm not the fool you thought I was. Unless you meet me here in an hour, with something more solid than airy promises, I'll start making phone calls to sympathetic ears at the various Embassies in Rome. Most of them will be very sympathetic, I'm sure, particularly to my romantic story of your activities and whereabouts in Italy. Don't you agree?"

Polov laughed. "You have a gift of phrase, my friend. But you worry needlessly. Do you have a car? If so, you can come here and we shall settle the matter immediately."

"I said in La Spezia."

"That is inconvenient for me."

"The alternatives may possibly be more inconvenient."

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"Those neat phrases again! Very well. How much do you want?"

"Five million lire."

"Really, that's absurd!"

"I'm not going to bargain."

"Ah, well, I wouldn't either if I were in your place. The Hotel Reale, is that it?"

"Yes, I'll be in the lobby."

"We will settle this within the hour. Good-bye."

The phone clicked and Johnny replaced the receiver. "Once I started, it was all right," he said, and rubbed a hand slowly across his damp forehead. "I—I fooled him, didn't I?" He began to laugh softly, jerkily.

"You did fine. Let's go," Mark said sharply.

He paid the proprietor for the call and led Johnny out to the car. Driving was more difficult now; the darkness had settled solidly and completely, and heavy masses of fog were drifting down the mountainsides onto the road. He drove slowly, checking the speedometer frequently, and after three kilometres he slowed down, looking for a place to turn off the highway. Polov would be coming this way now, pushing his car to the limit; but he might recognize them if they passed on this narrow road. There was nothing to do but find some place to hide until he had gone by.

He went another kilometre, and still another, without finding shelter of any kind. To his left was the sheer rock of the mountain wall, on his right a drop into the valley. In spite of the deep, penetrating cold, he felt perspiration starting on his forehead. This mustn't go wrong.

Then he heard another engine sounding faintly above the whine of his car. He swore as he cut the lights and slammed his foot on the brake. In the silence the sound of the approaching car swelled up distinctly, coming from below him and from the right. This was Polov, he knew.

Mark began turning the Renault, jerking the wheel furiously as he backed and started in the narrow road. There was only this chance, to let Polov pass them while they were both travelling in the same direction. He wouldn't have any suspicions about a car that was going away from Vorno's farmhouse.

"Get your head down," he said to Johnny, as he straightened out finally, and started back up the road.

"It's Polov, isn't it?" Johnny cried.

"Yes. Damn it, get your head out of sight."

Within a minute, headlights swept over them, and a horn blasted insistently. Mark moved over, giving them room to pass, and put his hand up alongside his face. The horn sounded again, deafeningly, and then a low-slung black Citroën rushed past them at reckless speed. There were two men in the front seat, big men whose shoulders filled it completely, and in the light of his own headlights, Mark recognized them before the car roared into a turn and its tail-light was snuffed out in the darkness.

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He slowed down, breathing deeply, and came to a stop. Johnny straightened up and stared at him, his face sickly and white in the feeble glow from the dashboard.

"Was it Polov?" he said.

Mark didn't bother to answer. He turned the car round and started back towards Vorno's farm, taking the turns with a reckless whine of rubber and brakes.

"What are you going to do?" Johnny said. He sat forward, staring at the road, his pale hands locked together in his lap.

"The odds are as good as they'll ever be," Mark said. He was suddenly furious with himself, at his nerves and fears. "Now, shut up!"

The road turned and dipped familiarly, and in a few more seconds he saw the light from the farmhouse blinking on his left, suspended and unreal in the darkness. He slowed down and snapped off the headlights, watching for the entrance to the farm. Fatigue had settled on him suddenly, unfairly, with a leaden, smothering weight. His eyes ached from lack of sleep, and the muscles in his arms were quivering with exhaustion.

Now you've got to do it, he thought. There was no time for plans or deception. It had to be a direct attack.

He saw the turn and swung the wheel sharply. They coasted into the clearing before the house, which loomed above them, dark except for the light on the ground floor. Whoever was inside would hear the car, of course, but they might think it was Polov returning.

He opened the door and got out of the car. There was a thin crust of ice on the muddy ground which cracked protestingly under his weight, but nothing else disturbed the cold, dark silence. Mark walked across the clearing to the front door, and hammered on it with his fist. Then he took the gun from his pocket. He was beyond caution now, beyond fear.

Shuffling footsteps sounded inside the house, and a querulous voice shouted something in Italian. Mark didn't answer, and in a few seconds the bolt pulled free with a rasping, metallic sound. He drove his shoulder against the door then, flinging it open, and went towards the squat, broad-shouldered man in the hallway, who stared at him, his mouth opening and closing soundlessly. The lower half of the man's face was covered with an iron-grey beard, and he wore thick felt slippers on big, clumsy feet. He carried a poker in his right hand, casually, as if he'd been seeing to a fire when the knock sounded, and it wasn't until Mark was almost on top of him that he seemed to remember it.

Then he backed off quickly, going down in a springy crouch and raising the poker above his head. Shouting something, he swung it in a vicious arc at Mark's gun hand. The blow missed, the poker rang loudly on the wooden floor, and Mark stepped in and slugged him across the temple with the barrel of his gun. The man twisted sideways, whining with pain, and Mark, feeling nothing at all now, hit him with all the strength in his arm.

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Player's complete it

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IT'S THE TOBACCO THAT COUNTS

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He stepped back from the falling body, holding the gun at his hip, and glancing quickly to right and left, into empty, crudely furnished rooms. For a few seconds he waited tensely, in a half-crouch, but the silence in the house was even and still. Then he turned into the room on his right, walked past a fire-place in which logs were burning, and into a cold, draughty kitchen. There was a light switch on the wall, near the foot of a flight of stairs which led to the upper floor.

He flipped the switch and went slowly up the steps, gripping the gun tightly in his right hand. The silence was deep and still. He stopped at the landing, breathing quietly, and looked down a cold hallway that was weakly lighted by a single bare bulb. He moved carefully forward, listening to the silence. A door on his right stood ajar. He opened it slowly and the light fell across a bed on which a man lay with his face turned to the wall.

The man was breathing slowly, deeply, and Mark knew that it was Papa George. He saw the familiar features, stern and formidable even in the depths of a drugged sleep. He shook his shoulder and spoke his name sharply, but nothing changed in the rugged, faintly frowning face.

Mark returned to the hallway and checked the next room; it contained nothing but a dismantled bed and two broken chairs. Now his breathing was faster, and the quickened stroke of his heart sounded heavily in his ears. He could feel and taste his fear as he came to the last room, and opened the door.

The light from the hall swung across a cold, dark room. He saw that Amanda lay on a wooden cot, twisted on her side, and then he saw the bonds at her wrists and legs and the terror in her eyes as her head turned towards the opening door. Something sounded in his throat as he went to her and began to tear the coarse sheeting away from her hands and ankles. He said her name over and over in a low, furious voice, holding her close to him then, everything in him hungering for the feel of her body safe in his arms.

She didn't begin to cry until he said, "It's all right now, it's all right, it's over." Then he felt the trembling in her shoulders, and the tears on her cheeks.

"They said you were dead," she whispered against his face.

"I almost walked into it," he said. "But it's over now. Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes. Where's Polov?"

"He's out of the way. But we've got to hurry."

He helped her to stand and she leaned against him for a few seconds, catching her breath sharply as the circulation returned to her arms and legs.

"They were waiting for a plane," she said. "It's coming tomorrow morning."

"They've wasted their time," Mark said, helping her into the hallway. "We'll be gone when they get back here. Now, listen: Johnny Dreyk is in a car at the front of the house. Go down and

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tell him to drive round to the back. I'll bring Papa George down that way. Can you make it, do you think?"

"Yes, of course. Is he all right?"

"He's been drugged. But he looks O.K."

"Mark, I've been so wrong," she said, in a small blurred voice. "About you, about myself, about everything. I never thanked you. I never saw you clearly."

He tried to smile, but it wasn't possible; he was thinking of her brother. "We'll talk about it later," he said.

She squeezed his hand tightly. "Yes, we'll talk about it later, Mark." She went quickly towards the stairs, limping slightly, but still moving with the easy grace that accompanied all her gestures.

Frowning tiredly, Mark watched her go, and then turned into Papa George's room. He couldn't tell her yet; there was still this job to finish. They had won, he knew. Polov wouldn't be back for another two hours; but he wouldn't relax until they were in Parma, and the police were on their way here.

After that, when it was finally over, he would tell her about her brother. But not yet.

Mark hoisted the sleeping old man onto his shoulder, and felt his heart hammer with the effort. He was all in now, completely finished, but it made no difference. The job was done. There were just these last few minutes to get by, and then they'd be safe. He went slowly down the stairs, moving awkwardly under the old man's weight, got the back door open, and stepped out into the darkness.

A few stars had come out now, and were shining faintly on the frozen ground. It had turned very cold; the wind whipping past him was edged like a knife. He heard the engine of the Renault start up, and a few seconds later the little car came bumping over the uneven ground beside the house. Amanda followed it, stepping carefully in her high-heeled shoes, and hugging her arms to her body against the bitter wind.

Johnny turned the car round, braked it, and climbed out, and Mark saw that his face, except for the cold-nipped spots on his cheek-bones, was starkly pale.

"Let's get out of here," he said, nervously. The wind had tumbled his hair about, and his eyes were bright with fear.

"Take it easy," Mark said. He lowered Papa George's body to the ground, his arms aching with fatigue. "We've got time, relax."

"You don't know Polov," Johnny yelled.

"The devil himself couldn't get to La Spezia and back in less than two hours tonight," Mark said. "Calm down now."

Amanda opened the rear door of the car, and he and Johnny worked the old man into the back seat. They propped him up in a sitting position, but his head rolled to one side and his breath came deeply and slowly.

"We'd better get a blanket for him," Mark said.

"There's no time!" Johnny pushed the tumbled hair away from his eyes. "Do you expect this idiotic luck to last for ever?"

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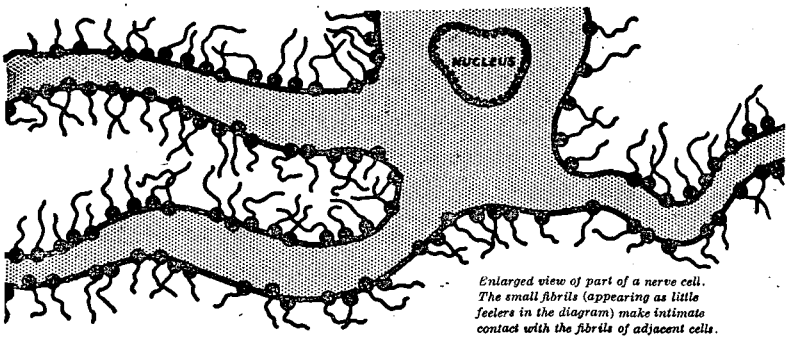
Sleeplessness and your nerves



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" O.K., let's go. Amanda, get in the back and try to keep him warm."

She was stepping into the car when they all heard it, the labouring whine of a distant engine, clear and isolated in the vast, windy silence.

No one moved for an instant; the wind swept round them, tugging at their clothes, but they stood perfectly still, listening to the car that was winding towards them through the mountains. They couldn't see the swaying beam of its lights yet, but the echoing noise of the engine mounted steadily in volume. It was a powerful car, travelling at high speed, Mark knew.

" It's coming from La Spezia! " Johnny said, clutching Mark's arm. " From La Spezia, you hear? "

Johnny cried, " It's Polov."

" No, that's impossible," Mark said. He wetted his lips, thinking, he's not the devil, he's only a human being. There was no way Polov could have known Johnny was lying, unless he could read the lie in a man's voice as he'd read a newspaper. Then he remembered the violin player at the trattoria, and a tremor ran down through him. Polov must have heard that music in the background; that would have told him Johnny wasn't phoning from a hotel lobby. If he thought about it, and his cold and terrible mind thought of everything, he would have stopped at the trattoria. And there he'd learn of the two Americans who had made a telephone call . . .

" Amanda, did you close the front door of the house? " he asked sharply.

" No, I didn't."

" Get in the car, both of you. Fast."

Mark ran to the house, strode through the living-room and into the hall. The front door stood open and light spilt out into the clearing. He closed the door, but didn't bolt it, and dragged Vorno's limp body back to the kitchen. Now Polov would have to enter the house and walk through to the kitchen to know for sure that anything was wrong.

He went out by the back door, pulling it shut after him, and hurried to the car. Johnny was inside, but Amanda stood at the rear door watching for him, her face a small pale blur in the darkness.

" All right, hop in," he said to her. Across the low top of the Renault he saw the wide swinging flash of headlights against the dark mountainside. About a quarter of a mile off, he guessed.

But Amanda hesitated, looking up at him, her hands locked together over her breasts. They were standing very close together, and the wind came between them like a high, thin wall. She touched his arm, and he saw the strain in the fine planes of her face, and the fear in her eyes.

" Don't worry, we've got a chance," he said.

But he hadn't understood. " Polov told me where to find my brother," she said.

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"Damn it, get in," Johnny cried, staring out at them.

"You can't trust Polov," Mark said to her. The headlights that were swinging in the mountains had suddenly disappeared, he saw. And the engine had faded out. Polov was coasting in silently, wrapped in darkness. "Better get in, Amanda," he said. Don't make me tell her now, he thought. Dear God, not now.

"If I could be sure," she said. "If only I knew—"

"Get in, you fools!" Johnny shouted, his voice cutting across hers with an edge of panic. "Your brother is dead. Mark shot him. He killed him. He's dead. Get in, you fools!"

"What's he saying?" Amanda said, her hand tightening on his arm.

"There's no time to talk," Mark said. Not now, please, he thought.

"Did you kill my brother?"

He stared over her head at the road, straining his eyes to catch the dark bulk of Polov's car. Maybe ten more seconds, fifteen . . . They might get past Polov, and they might not, but just now it didn't seem important. "Yes, I killed him," he said.

She turned away from him, lowering her head.

"Get in!" Johnny said, in a smothered, rasping voice.

"Shut up, let her cry," Mark said wearily. "She's got a right to cry."

"No," Amanda said, and climbed quickly into the car. Mark closed the door behind her, easing it shut and releasing the handle carefully, and got behind the wheel, and took his gun. Her voice had been empty, he thought. That was all. Empty.

He rubbed the windscreen clean with the palm of his hand, cranked down his window, and then put his hand on the starter.

"Get your heads down," he said quietly. Polov's car had come in sight an instant before he spoke, a long black shadow, sliding soundlessly down the road.

When he heard the crunch of tires in the clearing before the house, he flipped on the ignition. A car door opened and closed softly, the sound carrying in the silence, and then heavy footsteps broke the ice-crusted ground. Now, Mark thought, they're at the front door, opening it, stepping into the hallway.

He gave them five seconds to walk from the hall to the kitchen. When his lips formed the number five, he pulled the starter and the engine kicked into life. He released the clutch and for an agonizing instant the wheels spun on the ice-slick ground; Johnny let out a shrill cry and beat his fists on his knees.

Then they were moving, bouncing over the uneven ground, and Mark jammed the accelerator to the floor. They shot forward into the clearing and he jammed on the brakes, bringing the little Renault to a skidding, swaying stop alongside Polov's car. From the house came a bellowing shout, and Mark said, "Heads down!" in a sharp, hard voice. He braced his gun on the edge of the car door, and fired two shots into the left rear tyre on Polov's car. Then he let out the clutch with a snap. They lurched forward,

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picking up speed rapidly, and Mark dropped the gun on the floor, and fought with both hands to control the jerking front wheels.

Two shots sounded behind them and then a third. He thought he could hear them whistle above their heads. They couldn't make La Spezia, he knew; that was fifty kilometres, and Polov could put on a spare tire and be after them in five minutes. Mark wheeled the car left on the highway, turning towards Parma. He wasn't sure that Parma was closer, but there might be a place on the way where they would be safe. Another shot sounded, and the bullet rang angrily against the mountainside, and then they were round the curve, and he snapped on his lights, and changed down into third gear.

Johnny bent forward slowly until his forehead rested on the dashboard. " We got away, we got away from him," he said. His shoulders shook as he began to laugh.

" He'll be after us," Mark said. " Amanda? "

" Yes? " She was sitting forward on the seat and her voice was close to his ear.

" Keep a look-out through the rear window," he said.

She didn't answer. He drove into the cold darkness, listening to the labouring of the engine as they began the slow, circular ascent to the higher ground. The Renault was tough and sturdy as an Italian mule, but Polov's Citroën was much faster. It wouldn't be long before he caught them.

They climbed steadily for ten minutes, and the motor was whining now, as it lost pressure in the thinning air. Snow-flurries raced through the yellow beams of the headlights, and the wind pounded at them in immense furious blasts.

The old man stirred in the back seat. Mark heard him grunt, and clear his throat, and then mutter something in an angry, bewildered voice. Then Amanda said gently, " No, it's all right, just relax and rest. You're all right. We're Americans."

" Americans! " The old man's voice was perplexed. Then, a few seconds later he laughed and, surprisingly, the sound of it was merry and vigorous. " Don't wake me up," he said.

" No, it's not a dream," Amanda said. " You're safe."

" I cannot . . . I cannot quite believe that," the old man said.

" Why don't you close your eyes and rest? " She took one of his big square hands and held it tightly.

" We are running from him? " he asked.

Mark said, " We've got a chance."

" Oh yes," the old man said. " There is always a chance." He laughed again, but the vigour was gone from his voice; it was puzzled and thoughtful and weary now.

Mark went slowly into the last turn below the crest of the mountain, the engine labouring sluggishly. Glancing down to his left, he saw the swinging flash of headlights in the darkness. He rounded the turn, wondering if they could keep ahead of Polov on the downhill run.

Amanda said sharply, " There's a car below us."

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"Yes, I saw it," he said. Polov will catch us, he thought, and he can drive us over the side, or shoot us to bits, and there's not one damn thing we can do about it.

"Amanda, I want you to understand something," he said. "I've got to talk fast now. Will you listen?"

"Yes, I'll listen," she said quietly.

"Your brother was working with Polov," he said. "He was guarding Johnny. He had a gun. I went for him and he was shot. With his gun. Do you understand that?"

"It doesn't make any difference," she said.

"*You must understand*," he said, and because this meant so much to him, his voice was suddenly hard and angry.

She could say anything except that it made no difference. Let her hate him, actively and violently, rather than retreat into this lifeless apathy.

"He might have shot me," he went on, "but he didn't. He took the bullet himself. And he said he was just too tired to do anything else. Maybe this whole mess was my fault. But I want you to understand about your brother."

"Mark, it doesn't make any difference," she said again, but now her voice had changed; and he understood what she had meant the first time.

She put her hand on his shoulder, and touched his cheek gently. "How could it make any difference, Mark? You did what you had to. I know that."

"I wanted you to understand," he said. He felt drained and weary, but strangely at peace.

There was nothing to worry about now except that they were going to die. He pulled the wheel round, turning into the snow-flecked darkness, feeling her hand and the warmth of her breath against his cheek.

Johnny glanced sideways at Mark, and saw her fingers, pale and slim against the dark stubble along his jaw. He raised his own hand slowly, guiltily, and touched his cheek. He stared out at the black scenery rushing past, and then, as tears started in his eyes, he clenched his hand, and ground it slowly, cruelly, against his lips.

Johnny shook his head, feeling the tears cold on his face. He'd had that once, the touch of a hand, the softness of a voice speaking his name in the darkness, but that was gone now, gone from him for ever.

When he realized what he intended to do, his breath came faster, and he summoned his old ally, fear, to his support. The decision had been made so abruptly that he was left dazed and shaken. No, I won't do it, he thought, waiting tensely for fear to save him. But his fear was gone too, he discovered. They had taken his love and his fear, and left him with nothing. He remembered the cold, empty expression in Peter's eyes, and he knew what his own eyes must look like now.

Grinning brightly, he bent and found the cold butt of Mark's gun on the floor. He picked it up and pushed the muzzle against

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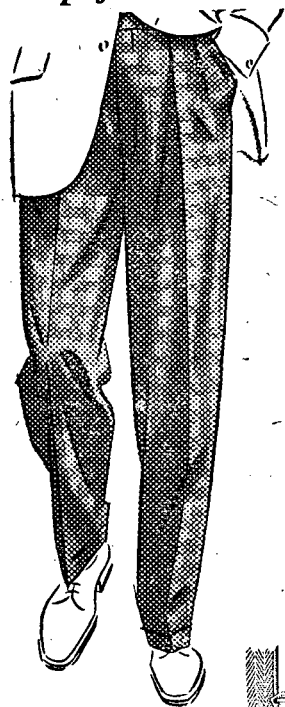

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Mark's side. " Stop or I'll blow a hole through you," he said.

Amanda screamed softly, " No, no, Johnny! "

" Put that down, you fool," Mark said, but he was already braking the car. There was a tone in Johnny's voice he had never heard before, and he knew he would shoot.

Johnny opened his door when the car stopped and climbed out into the road. He laughed and the wind tore the sound away from his lips and sent it screaming to the top of the mountain. " You go on now," he said. " I'm going to stop them. Get going! " He put his head in the open door, and his eyes were bright with bitter tears. " Look up my father, John Dreyk, Senior, if you ever get to Roanoke. Tell him little Johnny was a hero. He'll love that. He's got a fine sense of humour."

Then he slammed the door with all his strength and started back down the road, trotting easily and savouring the clean sting of the wind in his face. He ran downhill into a darkness in which nothing moved but the vast masses of wind that clawed up and down the steep, rocky sides of the mountains. The gun was in his right hand, bitingly cold against his palm, and he was shouting into the black, roaring night.

" Smart and safe," he said, again and again, syncopating the words with the sharp slap of his feet on the icy surface of the road. You weren't safe if you loved anything in the world, because then you could be hurt. It seemed such a simple and obvious truth to come on him in this way in the turbulence of wind and night. The only safety lay in hating. Those who hated were safe.

Headlights appeared below him, swinging into the road from a curve, and he began to laugh.

Oh yes, he thought, hearing his high, shrill laughter. The arts of safety! He hadn't been afraid of force because he was clever enough to keep out of its path, to ride along behind it, and watch the smash-ups from a safe distance in the rear.

Now he was running head on into force, into those twin yellow beams that raced up at him, and he was laughing. In a splintered flash of clarity, he knew he must be mad; but that didn't seem to matter.

The lights coming at him were like Polov's eyes, those eyes that saw everything, penetrated everything. They must be put out, he thought calmly.

As he raised the gun, an orange flash appeared at the side of the car. Something jarred his shoulder, numbing it for an instant, and then he felt a scalding, needle-sharp pain streaking down his side.

He fired the gun, felt it kick wildly against his palm, and saw another orange flame burn into the darkness at the side of the car.

They were almost on him, he realized with a touch of wonder. The roar of the engine was louder than the wind, and he could hear the clawing of rubber on the icy surface.

He saw a spider's web of cracks appear on the windscreen, felt the gun kick again in his hand, and then, in the instant before the car struck him, he saw Polov pulling at the slumping bulk in

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the driver's seat, and trying to get his hands on the steering-wheel . . .

They came down the road through the darkness, walking close together, his arm tight about her shoulders. The old man was a few feet behind them, his thick, broad body bent slightly forward, his stern, formidable face thrust into the wind. They didn't speak; they were watching the pinpoint of flame that burnt, deep down below them in the valley.

Mark stopped and looked closely at a stretch where the frozen earth had been ripped from the shoulder of the road. "It was here, I guess," he said.

He rubbed a hand along his jaw, feeling the cold, rough, two-day beard. "This is where they went over," he said. She nodded slowly, still watching the flaming wreckage of the car.

They stood together a moment or so without speaking, and then he said, "We'd better go on to Parma."

This had to be tidied up now that it was over; the Embassy, the police, and army intelligence would want reports, details, explanations. That was necessary, but it didn't mean anything; the important part was done.

He looked down at her, frowning at the expression on her square, elegant face. Once he had decided she wasn't pretty, he thought irrelevantly. "We'd better start," he said.

"All right." She rubbed her forehead slowly, and then turned to him, to his arms, and began to weep. He held her tightly.

"Oh, Mark, Mark," she said. Her voice was weary and broken against his chest.

He raised her chin and looked into her white, tear-streaked face. "We can forget this," he said.

Papa George stood a few feet from them, his arms folded, staring at the burning car.

She shook her head angrily. "No, we won't forget it," she said. "That's what they hope. That people will forget. And they do. They can't believe it happened. Even when they know it did. But we won't forget it. We'll remember."

"All right, we'll remember," he said gently.

She rubbed her cheek against the smooth coldness of his coat. "We'll have other things to remember in time, Mark."

"Sure we will." He raised her chin again and looked at her, his eyes hard and serious. "Sure we will," he murmured.

She smiled at him quickly, her lips trembling, and he knew that something had ended between them, but that something warmer and brighter would replace it.

Mark glanced at the old man. "We'd better go, sir."

"Yes," said Papa George.

They started up the hill together, but Papa George hesitated and turned back after a few steps, staring once again at the faint, fading flame in the valley. There was a frowning sadness in his tough old face, a sadness blended of strength and anger and pity. He spat

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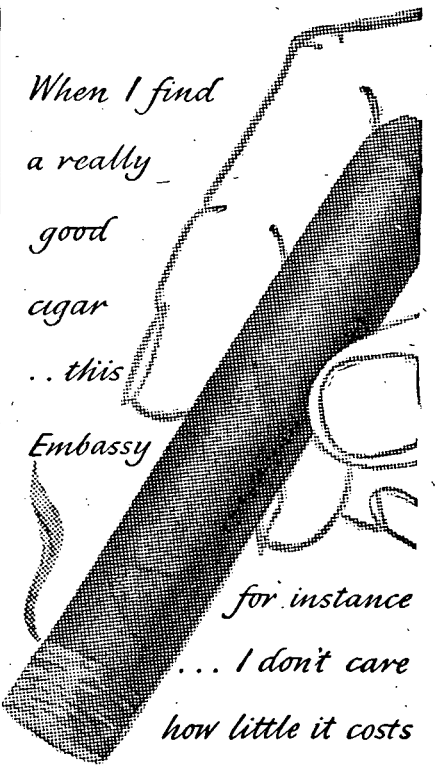

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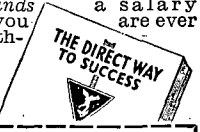

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These readers, who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Cygnet*. 4, *Cross-bow*. 9, *Yellow*. 10, *Renounce*. 12, *Toll call*. 13, *Upshot*. 15, *Long*. 16, *Stalagmite*. 19, *Abstinence*. 20, *Apes*. 23, *Aerate*. 25, *Reunited*. 27, *Abstruse*. 28, *Sleeve*. 29, *Assassin*. 30, *Brutus*.

Down. 1, *Crystal*. 2, *Golf-links*. 3, *Eroica*. 5, *Reel*. 6, *Stoppage*. 7, *Bench*. 8, *Wrestle*. 11, *Flatter*. 14, *Blacken*. 17, *Impatient*. 18, *Pictures*. 19, *Alabama*. 21, *Sadness*. 22, *Angler*. 24, *Roses*. 26, *Asti*.

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 17

Argosy's seventeenth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first five correct solutions checked on the closing date. If you do not wish to cut Argosy, copy your solution on to a plain sheet of paper, adding your name and address in capital letters. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 17), 3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp), to arrive by Thursday, October 7th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale December 10th.

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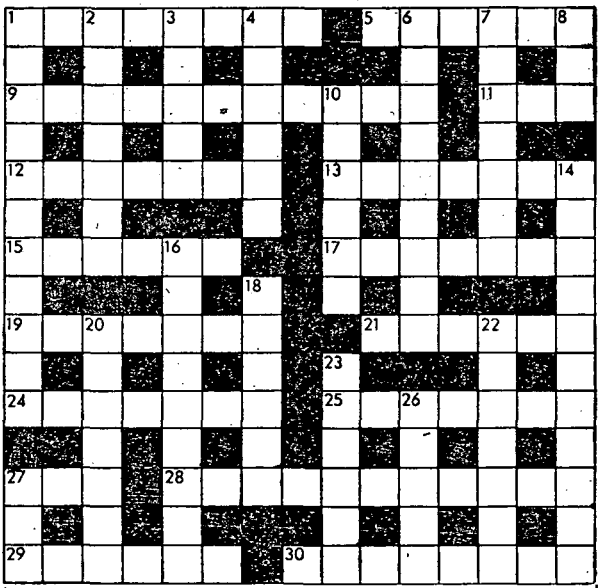
PRIZE CROSS WORD

No. 17

★

Rules of Entry on Page 143

★



BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

Name .....

Address .....

A.17 .....

CUT ALONG THE LINE

CLUES

Across

1 A team of witches scores three points for a Midland town (8).

5 House full; but only the centre is any good (6).

9 A fire-iron that's found in the garden (3-3, 5).

11 "I —— her on my pacing steed" (Keats) (3).

12 To us, Americans; to Americans, the Northerners (7).

13 A lone ram can become a hospital worker (7).

15 With a French article, this breed of horse is fit for ploughing (6).

17 Delete a hundred to be chosen (7).

19 Apostrophize the mountains to obtain fruit (7).

21 A beach, and what it is to be on it (6).

24 A poet, sir, may give you a sharp retort (7).

25 "Against the envy of less —— lands" (Shakespeare) (7).

27 What the milkmaid said (3).

28 Disturbed gas is followed by a people to a rendezvous (11).

29 Electra and Iphigenia were to Menelaus (6).

30 Slopes—with a favourable aspect (8).

Down

1 How an Oriental might cook up a good deed? (5, 6).

2 And a vet might produce this philosophic system (7).

3 A feature with nothing in it can still be a hanging matter (5).

4 Strike another attitude: it's restful (6).

6 These bad girls more than make up the brass section (9).

7 The lighthouse is quick with one means of catching fish (7).

8 Patriarch of the auction room (3).

10 This northern sea-monster wakes in science fiction (6).

14 Misleading left-wing fishes (3, 8).

16 The limb isn't on time to make law (9).

18 Aspirated, the willows could give you socks (6).

20 The snake speaks Gaelic, intending to defame (7).

22 O, a wing? That's what you think! (7).

23 The Japanese war-lord will display his weapon (6).

26 Proverbially unacceptable pig-food (5).

27 One of these deadly things could say: "We are seven" (3).

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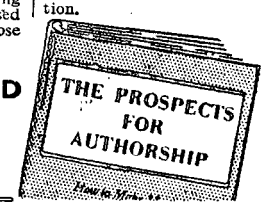
PRACTICAL RESULTS

Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it... *Student* 778/2119: I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it... *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start... *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS**... *Student* 1954/157: I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**: they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas... *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson... *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.



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